

# NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME PANEL

## REPORT TO THE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

9 AUGUST 2022

Report Title	Review of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's Fire & Rescue Statement for 2021/22
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### 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1. The report is intended to set out the results of the review by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's Fire & Rescue Statement for 2021/22.

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 The Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire is required to publish an annual Fire & Rescue Statement providing assurance of compliance with key strategic plans and requirements. The Fire & Rescue Statement must be reviewed by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel, resulting in the production of a report to the Commissioner.

### 3. Recommendations

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire:
- a) Considers this report by the Police, Fire & Crime Panel arising from its review of his Fire & Rescue Statement for 2021/22 carried out in accordance with the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 Schedule A2 Section 5.
  - b) Provides the Panel with a response to this report and its recommendations set out in section 6 in accordance with the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Section 12 Paragraph 4(a).
- 3.2 Reasons for Recommendation(s) – The recommendations are required to complete the Panel's review of the Fire & Rescue Statement for 2021/22 published by the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, in accordance with the Panel's statutory responsibilities.

## **4. Report Background**

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- 4.1 With effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire took responsibility for the governance of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS), as the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority.
- 4.2 The Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 requires the responsible Secretary of State to produce a Fire & Rescue National Framework setting out the priorities and objectives for Fire & Rescue authorities in connection with the discharge of their functions. Every Fire & Rescue authority must have regard to the National Framework in carrying out its functions and must publish an annual statement (the Fire & Rescue Statement) outlining how the authority and its Fire & Rescue service have had regard to:
- a) the National Framework
  - b) the Integrated Risk Management Plan agreed by the authority
  - c) the Fire & Rescue Plan, or similar strategic plan, agreed by the authority
- 4.3 The Fire & Rescue Statement must also provide assurance to the community and to the government on financial, governance and operational matters.
- 4.4 These requirements apply to Police & Crime commissioners who take on the functions of a Fire & Rescue authority under the provisions of the Policing & Crime Act 2017, as is the case in Northamptonshire.
- 4.5 Schedule A2 Section 5 of the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 specifies that when a Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC) produces a Fire & Rescue Statement it must be sent to the relevant Police, Fire & Crime Panel as soon as practicable.
- 4.6 The Police, Fire & Crime Panel must arrange a public meeting of the Panel to be held as soon as practicable after the Panel is sent the Statement.
- 4.7 The PFCC must attend the Police, Fire & Crime Panel meeting to present the Statement and to answer such questions from the Panel about it as Panel members think appropriate.
- 4.8 The Police, Fire & Crime Panel must review the Statement and make a report or recommendations on it to the PFCC. The report or recommendations of the Panel must be published. The PFCC must provide a response to the Panel and must also publish that response.

## **5. Review of the Fire & Rescue Statement**

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- 5.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel met in public on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2022 to review the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's Fire & Rescue Statement for 2021/22. The meeting was webcast live and a recording is available to view at: [West Northamptonshire Council - YouTube](#).

- 5.2 In presenting the Statement the Commissioner highlighted that NFRS had continued to carry out a range of significant work during the past year, whilst dealing with the highest level of staff sickness experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commissioner was proud of the further progress made on recruitment, the vehicle fleet and facilities. The past year had been an anomalous one due to the effect of the pandemic. The overall progress made by NFRS should be reflected in the report from its second inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), which was due to be published in the next week. The Commissioner concluded by thanking Darren Dovey for the support he had provided as Chief Fire Officer and for his leadership of NFRS, ahead of his retirement in October 2022.
- 5.3 The Panel then considered the position reported in the Fire & Rescue Statement and questioned the Commissioner on his confidence in the level of assurance it set out, with particular reference to operational assurance. The Chief Fire Officer provided additional information in response to points raised during the course of discussion as necessary.
- 5.4 A Panel member noted that average response times had increased in 2021/22 compared to 2020/21 and questioned the reasons for this. The Panel was advised that the position on response times reflected the end of lockdown but also challenges relating to availability at retained fire stations. Response times were better than they had been prior to the creation of the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority. The current average full response time also reflected that the average response time for fires in Northamptonshire was 9:58, but response times were higher for road traffic collisions and in rural areas.
- 5.5 A Panel member questioned whether the community outcome measure for staff sickness absence included mental health conditions as well as physical health. The Panel was advised that the measure covered all conditions. The end of year position for this measure for 2021/22 was worse than for 2020/21 due to the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chief Fire Officer commented that NFRS had some of the best wellbeing support provision for firefighters that he had seen in his professional experience and that it took the wellbeing of all staff very seriously. Panel members highlighted the fire service wellbeing support dog introduced by NFRS as an example of this attention. A Panel member subsequently sought further information about whether pressures on NFRS staffing in the past year had affected the Northamptonshire Emergency Services Cadets scheme. The Panel was advised that the scheme had moved over to on-line activity during the pandemic and had been able to do good work in supporting young people at a difficult time.
- 5.6 A Panel member sought reassurance that home safety visits (HSVs) were targeted effectively. The Panel was advised that the NFRS prevention strategy used a prioritised approach. HSVs were focussed on the most vulnerable people and the NFRS Prevention Team provided specialist support, including in response to referrals from partner agencies. Firefighters based at fire stations carried out activity focussed on a lower level of risk. NFRS also provided advice and information to enable members of the public to help themselves.
- 5.7 A Panel member sought confirmation of when the new Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) would be finalised and whether it had been informed by public consultation. The Panel

was advised that the new full CRMP would be published in the immediate future and had been informed by consultation both with the public and with NFRS staff. It was highlighted to the Panel that the CRMP linked to the Vision 25 document that the Chief Fire Officer had published to set out his views on the priorities for NFRS and the challenges it would face up to 2025. The Vision 25 document represented the Chief Fire Officer's professional views and so had not been subject to public consultation.

- 5.8 A Panel member noted that members of the public might not be aware of the range of support that NFRS provided to the other emergency services and questioned to what extent NFRS was remunerated for this part of its role. The Chief Fire Officer advised that NFRS received regular requests from the other emergency services to gain entry to properties, as well as for more specialist responses such as support in cases involving bariatric patients. Medical co-responding was carried out by retained firefighters on a voluntary basis. This additional work was not done at the expense of NFRS's core functions. The Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 specified the core functions of Fire & Rescue authorities and those for which they could charge. However, the 2004 Act defined core functions in relatively narrow terms. There was a view within the sector that Fire & Rescue authorities should be given a statutory role in responding to flooding and carrying out inland water rescue, with the appropriate accompanying resources. The future role and working arrangements of firefighters were under discussion at national level and were the subject of proposals in the Fire & Rescue White Paper.
- 5.9 The Chief Fire Officer was asked to give a view at the end of his tenure about how community safety in Northamptonshire had improved. The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that in the period 2016-2019 NFRS had a shrinking budget, fewer officers and aging equipment. Since the creation of the Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority a three-year financial stabilisation plan had been implemented and a capital programme had been developed that was delivering new appliances, which improved the safety of both Northamptonshire residents and NFRS personnel. Staff numbers were increasing again and a new headquarters for NFRS had been secured. The fact that NFRS had been able to improve performance whilst going through an organisational change was a testament to the work of all those involved. The timing of his retirement reflected that NFRS was at the end of a phase in its continuing journey of improvement.
- 5.10 The Chief Fire Officer was further asked to give a view about whether NFRS had enough effective fire appliances to meet likely future needs in the county. The Chief Fire Officer commented that NFRS had sufficient appliances but may need to consider whether it had the right mix to meet future demands. The range of incidents that Fire & Rescue services were now attending was getting broader, with the addition, for example, of incidents connected with flooding or extreme weather conditions. The functions carried out by full-time and retained firefighters in future were being considered at national level. NFRS's future planning should involve looking at how to meet changing risks not just whether it had the right number of appliances. In response to further questions the Panel was advised that ultra-high pressure capability was becoming increasingly available across Northamptonshire. The Commissioner had provided resources to enable the specification for new appliances now being ordered for NFRS to include this capability, further supporting the safety of residents and firefighters in the county.

5.11 Panel members joined the Commissioner in expressing thanks to the Chief Fire Officer for his service and dedication to Northamptonshire. It was highlighted during discussion that NFRS had come back strongly from the previous difficult period in its history. Its contribution to partnership working in Northamptonshire was also commended.

## **6. Outcomes of the Review**

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6.1 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel resolved:

**To commend the continuing progress and achievements reflected in the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's Fire & Rescue Statement for 2021/22.**

## **7. Background Papers**

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Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004

Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011

Policing & Crime Act 2017

Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel Terms of Reference.