

Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel
Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2021
Remote Meeting via Zoom
(Meeting held in public)

PRESENT:-

Councillor Gill Mercer	East Northamptonshire Council (Chair)
Councillor Richard Auger	Daventry District Council
Councillor Andre Gonzalez De Savage	Northamptonshire County Council
Councillor Martin Griffiths	Borough Council of Wellingborough [Items 15/21 to 16/21]
Councillor Ian Jelley	Kettering Borough Council [to Item 19/21]
Mr Robert Mehaffy	Independent Co-opted Member
Councillor Ken Pritchard	South Northamptonshire Council [from Item 17/21]
Mrs Anita Shields	Independent Co-opted Member
Miss Pauline Woodhouse	Independent Co-opted Member

Also in attendance for all or part of the meeting

Stephen Mold	Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC)
James Edmunds	Democratic Services Assistant Manager, Northamptonshire County Council
Emily Evans	Complaints & Customer Service Manager, Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (OPFCC)
Paul Fell	Director for Delivery, 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
Sophia Nartey	Deputy Monitoring Officer, Northamptonshire County Council

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm

10/21 Apologies for non-attendance

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Caine (Corby Borough Council), Duffy and King (Northampton Borough Council) and Strachan (Northamptonshire County Council). Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Griffiths (Borough Council of Wellingborough).

11/21 Notification of requests from members of the public to address the meeting

None received.

12/21 Declaration of Members' Interests

None declared.

13/21 Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting and made the following points:

- The Home Secretary had issued a statement on 16th March 2021 regarding the outcomes of the first part of the review of Police & Crime Commissioners started in 2020. Details had been circulated to Panel members. The outcomes included the development of a good governance training package for panels in conjunction with the Local Government Association; requiring all commissioners to appoint a deputy in future; and consulting on making the PFCC model the standard approach.
- The Chair had attended a virtual meeting of the East Midlands Police & Crime Panels Network on 22nd March 2021. The meeting had included discussion on a range of issues including the scope for panels to engage with other bodies such as the Police Federation and Crimestoppers; oversight of panel work programmes; and the latest phase of the Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales.
- The current meeting had a full agenda and members were encouraged to make their contributions as focussed as possible.
- This was the final Panel meeting ahead of local authority and PFCC elections on 6th May 2021. The Chair thanked members for their work during the past year and offered best wishes for the future.

14/21 Minutes of the Police, Fire & Crime Panel meeting held on 3rd February 2021

RESOLVED that: the minutes of the Police, Fire & Crime Panel meeting held on 3rd February 2021 be agreed.

15/21 Responding to COVID-19 and the impact on policing and community safety in Northamptonshire

The PFCC introduced the report (copies of which had previously been circulated) providing an update on the response to COVID-19 in the county, highlighting the following points:

- There was now a positive outlook but it was essential to come out of lockdown in a way that did not put at risk the efforts made so far.
- The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented situation but it had demonstrated the ability of the local emergency services to respond to challenges. All were proud of the work that had been done and the positive and pragmatic approach taken.
- The outcomes of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)'s inspection of how well Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) had responded to the pandemic showed the benefits produced by joint working between NFRS and Northamptonshire Police.
- Additional financial support received from the government during the pandemic had been vital. The Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) and the two services had worked very hard to secure resources required.
- He thanked all involved in responding to the pandemic for their hard work. Lessons would be learnt where necessary and best practice would be implemented. The strength that resulted from organisations working together would not be forgotten.

The Panel considered the report and members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- The benefits of joint working between emergency services were endorsed and it was questioned whether any permanent changes in this respect were likely to result from recent experience.
- The conclusions of the HMICFRS inspection were impressive, although it was important that the future focus areas it identified were also addressed.
- A large number of laptops had been issued to force personnel during the pandemic and it was questioned how these would be used in future.
- Reassurance was sought as to how far the PFCC and service leaders were now planning for changes in demand and activity that may result from easing lockdown.
- Further information was sought about action being taken to improve engagement with particular local communities about lockdown regulations and the enforcement of these.
- It was questioned what planning had been done locally for a scenario in which infection rates got out of control again and a further lockdown proved necessary. Such a situation could lead to significant public frustration, which might be exploited by disruptive groups.
- The provision of appropriate guidance and information for members of the public, particularly young people who had received most Fixed Penalty Notices for breaching lockdown regulations, would now be important to counteract the idea that the pandemic was over.

The PFCC made the following additional points during the course of discussion:

- A white paper was due to be produced on the future role of Police & Crime commissioners, which would move towards making Police, Fire & Crime commissioners a standard model. This would reflect joint working during the pandemic.
- He was participating in the current meeting from the enabling services hub at Darby House, Wellingborough. This facility was an example of Northamptonshire laying foundations now that would pay off in future.
- Consolidating the force and NFRS control rooms would help to support a better response to future requirements arising, for example, from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the Kerslake Review of the Manchester Arena attack.
- Work carried out by the OPFCC using Safer Streets funding would not have been possible without related activities by the force and NFRS such as home safety checks.
- Some of the future focus areas identified by HMICFRS were already being addressed: for example, appointing a joint head of IT services would help to improve services.
- It had been planned to expand the provision of laptops to the force as part of the roll out of MS 365. This had been accelerated in response to the pandemic, which had also produced a financial benefit as laptops had been purchased at a time when suppliers were keen to sell stock. It was likely that a more blended approach to work would continue after the pandemic.
- Significant planning was taking place through the Local Resilience Forum regarding the easing of lockdown, including contingency planning to take into account potential issues such as a further wave of COVID-19 or economic problems.
- Lateral flow testing would help to support the health of personnel who had not yet been vaccinated.

- He and the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer wanted their respective services to reflect the communities they served. Significant recent recruitment, particularly to the force, would help to enhance communication and engagement with different groups within local communities.
- Action was being taken to understand the different implications of the pandemic: for example, he had recently met with Somali community leaders to discuss the risk that cases of female genital mutilation could increase as lockdown was eased. Considerable work was being done to communicate with different community groups on matters relating to the pandemic.
- He was confident in the level of planning for future contingencies being done in Northamptonshire, which had generally been good. The recent situation in Germany regarding the impact of introducing a further lockdown was an example to all. It was important that easing lockdown measures did not lead to complacency.
- The force had been complemented by HMICRS for seeking to engage with people breaking lockdown regulations before moving to enforcement action. However, the force had also used its enforcement powers appropriately to deal with cases involving repeated or significant breaches.
- Personal responsibility was part of the response to the pandemic. People needed to be informed about risks, including correcting any misperceptions. However, once this had been done there was a role for enforcement action. He believed that the force had achieved the right balance between engagement and enforcement, which was not the case in some other areas.

[Councillor Griffiths entered the meeting during the preceding discussion].

The Chair emphasised that the pandemic had represented an unprecedented situation and all were aware of the massive challenges that it had created, even now when the outlook was improving. Members commended the efforts of those involved in the response to it.

RESOLVED that: the Panel records its thanks to Northamptonshire Police and Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service personnel for their work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

16/21 Operation of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's responsibilities relating to the police complaints system

The PFCC introduced the report (copies of which had previously been circulated), highlighting the following points:

- The Policing & Crime Act 2017 had made significant changes to the operation of the police complaints system, including giving Police & Crime commissioners a greater role.
- He had sought to take this opportunity as the expanded role gave insight into the force's performance and into public concerns, which supported his role of holding the Chief Constable to account. Responding effectively to complaints also helped to support public confidence.
- The OPFCC had established a Complaints & Customer Service Team (CCST) to manage the complaints function.

The OPFCC Complaints & Customer Service Manager then presented an overview of the operation of the PFCC's responsibilities relating to complaints, making the following points:

- The 2017 Act gave Police & Crime commissioners three different models for carrying out the complaints function. The PFCC had chosen to adopt model two, which involved responsibility for dealing with reviews of non-serious complaints; for receiving and recording complaints; and for carrying out informal resolution or service recovery of non-serious complaints.
- The 2017 Act also updated the definition of a complaint to include any expression of dissatisfaction with a police force.
- The CCST consisted of the Manager and two full time equivalent caseworkers.
- When a complaint was received it was assessed by the CCST to identify if it involved potential misconduct. If this was not the case the complaint was deemed suitable for service recovery by the CCST. The CCST had access to police systems and body worn video footage. The outcomes of service recovery could include providing feedback to an individual's line manager on low level matters.
- Complainants were generally satisfied with the outcomes of service recovery. If the complainant was not satisfied the CCST was required to refer the matter to the force's Professional Standards Department (PSD).
- A member of the public could request a review if they were not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint. The PFCC taking responsibility for reviews provided more independence than when they were formerly dealt with by the PSD. The OPFCC had initially commissioned an external provider to carry out reviews to give sufficient capacity, with a view to bringing the function back in-house later. It had been possible to do this earlier than anticipated using additional capacity available during lockdown.
- A review considered whether all relevant lines of enquiry had been followed in relation to the complaint; whether all of the points made in a complaint had been properly addressed; and whether the outcome was reasonable and proportionate. The PFCC had delegated responsibility for decision-making on reviews to the Director for Delivery.
- A review could result in a recommendation for a complaint to be referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC); to be investigated; or for action intended to remedy the complainant's dissatisfaction.
- From 1st February 2020 to 31st January 2021 the CCST had dealt with 464 formal complaints, 270 service recoveries and 672 questions and other matters. The IOPC identified 60 per cent as a good rate for service recovery and Northamptonshire was now above this level.
- The CCST had carried out 55 reviews: 7 of these had been upheld and 7 recommendations made to address complainants' dissatisfaction. In the other 48 cases it was concluded that the response to the original complaint had been satisfactory.
- The CCST operated to a Service Level Agreement (SLA) requiring complaints to be acknowledged and recorded within two days of receipt.
- The CCST received monthly reports from the PSD on all complaints that had remained open for over 12 months and carried out monthly dip-sampling of closed files. The PSD dip-sampled complaints dealt with by the CCST.
- The CCST was able to use IOPC information to compare performance in Northamptonshire with that of other forces.

The Director for Delivery made the following points:

- The IOPC had identified the CCST as an example of good practice in relation to the use of service recovery.
- It was possible that Police & Crime commissioners' current role could be extended in future beyond recommending actions as a result of reviews.
- The current SLA for acknowledging and responded to complaints resulted in a much better response than had previously been the case under the force.

The PFCC made the following points:

- He also commended the CCST's performance.
- Model two represented the best balance between the level of demand on the OPFCC and the outcomes seen by members of the public.
- Service recovery was an effective means of responding to low level complaints. He considered that members of the public wanted police officers to be able to use their judgement: a small mistake should be learnt from but should not end a career. At the same time, significant wrongdoing should be addressed appropriately.
- The 464 formal complaints dealt with in the past year was a notably small number given that the force dealt with 100,000s of incidents.

The Panel considered the report and presentation and members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- It was questioned whether there was any evidence of greater public satisfaction or confidence in the new complaints system in Northamptonshire.
- It was questioned whether the PFCC had a role in decision-making relating to individual complaint reviews. Members of the public could perceive that the system was not as independent as it should be if decisions were made by the Director for Delivery, who was a former police officer.
- Good work was being done in Northamptonshire in relation to police complaints.
- Service resolution could be a more descriptive term to use for the function than service recovery.
- It could be most productive to seek customer satisfaction feedback on the complaints process immediately after communicating the outcome to a complainant.
- A multi-agency approach could be helpful when dealing serial complainants. Repeated complaints might be an indication of an underlying need. However, it could also be useful to be able to identify if the same person was making multiple complaints to different organisations.
- Further information was sought as to how the number of complaint reviews carried out in Northamptonshire compared to the position in similar force areas.
- Reassurance was sought as to the PFCC's level of confidence in the effectiveness of the force's complaints function.

The PFCC made the following additional points:

- The PFCC was ultimately responsible for the delivery of the complaints function. He was satisfied that it was being administered effectively by the officers concerned.

- The Director for Delivery's knowledge as a former police officer put him in a better position to deal with complaints, including the liaison with the force that this involved.
- Ensuring that the OPFCC dealt with police complaints effectively could reduce the number of complaints about the PFCC that were made to the Panel.
- Greater public satisfaction with the complaints function in Northamptonshire could be reflected in increasing public confidence in the force.
- The current model did involve an anomaly that Police & Crime commissioners could not investigate a complaint independently as a complaint had to be investigated by the force. He would be making a case for this situation to be changed.
- There was an ambition to continue to improve the operation of the complaints function in Northamptonshire where necessary, which was reflected in the decision taken to bring the review function in-house after the first year of operation. The OPFCC would aim to take account of good practice in other force areas relating to surveying public satisfaction. The Ministry of Justice was also carrying out a national review of the effect of implementing the new approach. However, the fact that the CCST had been recognised by the IOPC for good practice should not be under-rated.
- He was confident that the force's complaints function was effective. This judgement was informed by regular dialogue with the IOPC, which had access to benchmarking information for different forces, as well as other activity such as dip-sampling of complaints. He was confident that no systematic issues existed in the force as the systems in place would be able to identify them. At the same time, there was still further scope to improve arrangements relating to complaints and this could be addressed in the second phase of the review of Police & Crime commissioners.

The Director for Delivery provided additional information in response to points raised by members during the course of discussion as follows:

- Service recovery could enable an explanation of a situation to be provided to a complainant, which was often sufficient to address their dissatisfaction. In other cases, the nature of a complaint could mean that there was no action that the OPFCC could reasonably take beyond providing an explanation of the original situation. Service recovery was only used for low level complaints. Service recovery was the title given to the function in legislation.
- The current model was still only a year old. The OPFCC had only started carrying out complaint reviews in late summer 2020 as the 2017 Act was not retrospective. The CCST had conducted surveys to gather customer satisfaction data but responses so far had been too small to be useful. It aimed to address this in future.
- The number of reviews needing to be dealt with by the CCST was similar to estimates that had been made before the decision was taken to establish it.
- Representatives from the force control room met regularly with other relevant agencies with regard to serial service users.
- Very few malicious complaints were received. Even serial complainants genuinely believed that they had been wronged.
- A complaint review considered the response to the original complaint by the PSD: it was not a re-investigation of the complaint.

The Complaints & Customer Service Manager provided additional information in response to points raised by members during the course of discussion as follows:

- The IOPC was due to produce a study of the complaints dealt with across all force areas early in 2021/22. Anecdotal evidence was that Northamptonshire was mid-range in terms of the numbers of complaints received and upheld.
- A complaint review could take hours or days to complete, depending on the complexity of the case.
- Dip-sampling of complaints would show if procedures were not being followed correctly. She also liaised regularly with the PSD Manager regarding complaints.

The Chair commented at the conclusion of discussion that the update had provided a reassuring picture.

RESOLVED that: the Panel notes the overview of the operation of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's responsibilities relating to the police complaints system.

[Councillor Griffiths left the meeting at this point].

17/21 Fire & Rescue Plan Delivery Update

The PFCC presented the report (copies of which had previously been circulated), highlighting the following points:

- Recent activity by NFRS had clearly been dominated by the response to the pandemic.
- The outcomes of the HMICFRS inspection into NFRS's response to the pandemic demonstrated the overall improvement it had made. The government recognised the scale of the challenge involved in rebuilding NFRS but good progress had been made so far: for example, average response times had improved month-on-month.
- NFRS had reached a better position by this point than might have been assumed when governance responsibility was transferred to the PFCC.

The Panel considered the report and Panel members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- It was questioned whether interoperability was an area where the PFCC wished to see further progress made.
- It would be important for relevant organisations to carry out joint exercises on the new Northamptonshire authorities' emergency plans, particularly to test the ability to deal with more than one incident at the same time.
- It was questioned when the PFCC would expect to have a balanced Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in place if he was re-elected in May 2021.

The PFCC made the following additional points in response to points raised by members during the course of discussion:

- He had spoken earlier that day with the Fire Service minister regarding further development of interoperability. The PFCC thought that there were good opportunities to build on work done in Northamptonshire under the Safer Streets Scheme, including alley-gating and installation of smoke alarms.

- The Kerslake Review had highlighted the disconnection between the police and Fire & Rescue service responses to the attack. This created additional impetus to bring together the two control rooms serving Northamptonshire.
- Northamptonshire had held robust inter-agency emergency exercises before the pandemic. The key issue that needed to be resolved for the emergency services following local government reorganisation was establishing good communication links into the new authorities to match previous ones with Northamptonshire County Council.
- Establishing an affordable capital programme was a key issue in relation to NFRS. The capital programme would be reviewed in the next year. It was sustainable in the short term.
- The case that had been made for transferring the governance of NFRS had recognised risks connected with the MTFP. The position that had been reached was better than originally expected. It was his role to provide challenge to maintain progress.

The Chief Finance Officer provided additional information in response to points raised by members during the course of discussion as follows:

- The OPFCC worked to the principle that a budget needed to be balanced over a minimum three year period to demonstrate that it was a going concern. This could be done for the Fire & Rescue Authority but it was a very tight position and would require the use of reserves.
- The OPFCC was in extensive discussion with the Home Office about future base budget funding for Fire & Rescue. It was seeking change through the next spending review. It would also be helpful for future funding settlements to cover more than one year.
- The OPFCC was working towards achieving a balanced MTFP by the time of the next proposed precept but this was a long process that would be influenced by a range of factors, which meant it was not possible at this time to give a commitment that it would be achieved. However, the financial position of the Fire & Rescue Authority was more stable than it had ever been and better than had been assumed in the governance transfer plan.
- The OPFCC had advised the Home Office that additional funding provided to Northamptonshire for 2021/22 was very welcome but did not make up for pressures on resources in the longer term. The Home Office wanted to work with Northamptonshire to understand the challenges it faced: it could not give any commitments at this point about future action but would be able to have an input into the next spending review.

[Councillor Pritchard entered the meeting during the preceding discussion].

RESOLVED that: the Panel notes the report.

18/21 Police & Crime Plan Delivery Update

The PFCC presented the report (copies of which had previously been circulated), highlighting the following points:

- Investment in frontline policing had been a key priority since he took office. He was proud that the number of neighbourhood police officers had been more than doubled, with more to come. This reflected an ongoing focus on neighbourhood policing.
- Overall, the force was still on-target to reach the largest number of police officers it had in its history.

- Work was continuing to install 150 new road safety cameras in the county, which would more than double the size of the Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) network. This would assist in the aim of creating a hostile environment for criminals in Northamptonshire.
- He considered that these focus areas reflected residents' priorities, as did work on other areas such as addressing residential burglary.
- The Safer Streets Scheme funding secured by the OPFCC had helped to deliver safety packs to homes, to provide other security measures and to invest in CCTV in Northampton, Kettering and Wellingborough.
- Investment in early intervention and crime prevention had been another of his focus areas as the PFCC and he was proud of the results achieved by the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) team that had been established.
- A lot had been delivered during his term in office, but there remained a lot more still to do.

The Panel considered the report. The Chair asked the PFCC to comment on the biggest achievement of his term in office and what he would have liked to have done better. The PFCC made the following points:

- He wished to highlight important successes in various areas: increased police recruitment; enhancing the ANPR network; the creation of the ACEs and Youth teams; the enabling services approach; and the recruitment of the current Chief Constable. The electorate would judge if he had done well enough.
- The difficult situation resulting from the previous decision to sell Wootton Hall Park without a clear plan for the future had been resolved during his term in office.
- Zoe Billingham was leaving her role as HMICFRS Inspector of the Constabulary for the Eastern Region in September 2021. He had sought an assurance from her that the force's recent progress was considered to be represent genuine improvement. Ms Billingham had advised that the force was now built on firm foundations both in relation to performance and finance. Northamptonshire Police was now a progressive and ambitious force.

Panel members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- The new area commander for the west was ensuring good attendance by force representatives at community meetings, which helped to promote visibility at a neighbourhood level.
- Good results had been achieved in Northamptonshire from operations focussed on particular types of crime, such as residential burglary. If the PFCC was re-elected he should work with the Chief Constable to consider the scope for the force to apply this approach to addressing domestic violence, which was a more significant issue.
- Concerns were raised about performance detailed in the report against key performance indicators for domestic abuse and sexual offences. Victim satisfaction with regard to domestic abuse was below the target. Reassurance was sought about the PFCC's level of confidence that the force would achieve necessary performance levels, particularly given factors such as the impact of the pandemic and the backlog in court cases.
- Concern was raised about the impact of lockdown on people experiencing domestic violence. The relevant organisations needed to make appropriate plans for future provision, particularly given that Refuge facilities in Northamptonshire had been reduced.

- A resident who had recently experienced an attempted burglary had received good support from Voice and a good response from the police officer working on the case. The perpetrator had been caught.
- The PFCC was asked to comment on the death of Sarah Everard in relation to policing and community safety in Northamptonshire.
- It would be helpful for future reports to include the dates of the decision records listed.

The PFCC made the following additional points during the course of discussion:

- He had invested in action to address domestic violence, including to support the use of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and a more proactive approach to domestic violence arrests. He considered that the force's response to domestic violence could be improved but was better than might be perceived. Domestic violence was also not an issue that could be addressed by policing alone.
- The criminal justice system in Northamptonshire had experienced a serious issue with a backlog in court cases for several years. His predecessor had offered to commit £1m funding to addressing this situation, but this proposal had not been accepted. Northamptonshire was no longer being considered as the location for a Nightingale court. The resident judge and others had done good work but this was not reducing the existing backlog.
- He was very concerned about the impact of court delays in relation to crimes of violence against women. It was more difficult for a victim of crime to seek to move on with their life if it took a long time for a case to reach court.
- He held the Chief Constable to account for the force's performance on different types of crime. HMICFRS had recognised that the force was making progress in all areas, although it had not yet achieved 'good' or 'outstanding' ratings. It took time to deliver sustained improvement, particularly given pressures on resources. Good work that was now being done by the force had also not yet reached court.
- He would still like to see a single agency made statutorily responsible for addressing domestic violence.
- Refuge provision was commissioned by central government.
- The crime clear-up rate in Northamptonshire was increasing in relation to recent crimes. The overall position had been affected by a large number of historic cases in the previous year and the effect of the court backlog, given that a clear up currently required a successful prosecution. This situation added to the need to consider other types of resolution, as an outcome without prosecution could be better overall. It would also be fairer if the clear up rate for the police was measured on the number of cases successfully submitted to court.
- It was important to speak responsibly about the death of Sarah Everard: it was an active police investigation and the cause of death had not yet been identified. The wider issues raised by the case concerned the safety of women in society. On his first day as PFCC he had stated that the force had the task of ensuring that a woman should be able to go out and about safely. This was reflected in subsequent work under the Safer Streets Scheme and other activity. Societal change was required to address all of the issues involved. However, it was a matter on which he felt strongly as well as being the father of a young daughter himself.
- The decision to end involvement in Multi-Force Shared Services (MFSS) with effect from 3rd November 2022 represented the end of several years' work. He and the Chief

Constable had reached the conclusion that MFSS did not provide best value for Northamptonshire. The development of enabling services allowed services to be brought back to the county and delivered more cost-effectively for both the force and NFRS.

The Director for Early Intervention provided additional information in response to points raised by members during the course of discussion as follows:

- Intervention activity was being used to respond to domestic violence at an early stage with a view to preventing issues from becoming more serious, supported by additional staff in the ACEs Team. It could be challenging to show the benefit of this work in purely numerical terms, as was the case with all early intervention activity.
- The new Northamptonshire local authorities were statutorily responsible for housing and would need to consider their approach to housing for vulnerable people.
- Refuge was intended to provide a place to stay for a short time rather than a long term response. There would always be a need for some Refuge provision but it should be used in the intended way.

RESOLVED that: the Panel notes the report.

19/21 Fire & Rescue Authority Budget Update

The PFCC presented the report (copies of which had previously been circulated) setting out the latest forecast outturn position and an overview of the financial impact of COVID-19, highlighting the following points:

- The Fire & Rescue Authority had secured an additional £128,000 funding towards the response to the pandemic since the report had been completed. It had also received £71,000 funding from work with the Home Office relating to the impact of the pandemic.
- He continued to work with the Home Office towards securing a permanent increase in base budget funding for Northamptonshire.

The Panel considered the report and members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- The additional £2m funding provided by the Home Office to support the 2021/22 Fire & Rescue Authority budget was welcome, but it remained a concern that base budget funding had not been increased.
- The support that NFRS had provided to the East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) NHS Trust during the pandemic had been excellent, but it was questioned whether EMAS had contributed to the cost of this.
- COVID-19 would have an effect on people's health and wellbeing for years to come. Assurances were sought that NFRS personnel would be provided with continuing support, for example through proactive testing.

The PFCC made the following additional points during the course of discussion:

- Securing an increase in base budget funding would be a key future priority if he was re-elected in May 2021.
- NFRS personnel were provided with a range of support in relation to COVID-19. Further information could be provided to the Panel if required.

The Chief Finance Officer provided additional information in response to points raised by members during the course of discussion as follows:

- The Fire & Rescue Authority would not need to return any unused COVID-19 funding at the end of the financial year. In any case, there would be no issue with identifying uses for it. The Authority forecast usage to the end of 2021/22 and made monthly returns to the Home Office.
- EMAS had been invoiced in relation to support provided by NFRS during the pandemic. Further information on this could be provided to the Panel if required.
- The latest COVID-19 financial support provided to Northamptonshire represented the full amount for which the Fire & Rescue Authority had bid. The requirement to cover a proportion of the sum locally had not been applied in this case. This would have required Northamptonshire to contribute £50,000.

[Councillor Jelley left the meeting during the preceding discussion].

RESOLVED that:

- a) The Panel requests to be provided with off-agenda written information advising of the sums for which East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust has been invoiced for activity carried out by Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- b) The Panel requests to be provided with off-agenda written information giving an overview of health and wellbeing support being provided to Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service personnel in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- c) The Panel notes the report.**

20/21 Policing Budget Update

The PFCC presented the report (copies of which had previously been circulated) setting out the latest forecast outturn position, highlighting the following points:

- The position set out in the report reflected improvements that had been made in financial planning and management. In turn, this put the PFCC and the Chief Constable in a better position to meet future challenges.
- He had committed to investing in frontline policing in Northamptonshire. The force would reach a strength of 1,367 officers by the end of 2020/21. There was a commitment then to reach 1,500 officers and to maintain this number for as long as possible.
- He had been guaranteed by the minister for policing that there would be a review of the policing funding formula during the current parliament.
- He wanted to take the opportunity to put on record his thanks to the Panel for their previous support. All were working in the interests of Northamptonshire. The Panel had held the PFCC to account in a constructive way, which was not the case in other areas.
- He thanked the Democratic Services Assistant Manager for his work to support the effective operation of the Panel, particularly whilst it had been meeting remotely.

The Chair also thanked the Democratic Services Assistant Manager for the support he had provided to the Panel.

The Panel considered the report and members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- Further information was sought about discussion at the Police Accountability Board meeting on 12th January 2021 concerning speeding up the disposal of some properties that had been identified for closure.
- It was questioned whether the policing budget included provision for responding to major public order incidents such as those that had recently occurred in Bristol.

The PFCC made the following additional points during the course of discussion:

- Some properties identified for closure had been subject to offers that had ultimately not come through. The pandemic had also affected the property market. However, he thought that more progress could have been made in some cases, particularly given that property disposals reduced running costs as well as generating a receipt.
- The policing budget included operational contingencies for the costs of responding to a major public order incident.

The Chief Finance Officer advised that the budget available to the Chief Constable included various contingencies for major incidents totalling around £5m. There were also options to use reserves or to seek funding from a Home Office grant funding stream, although the PFCC would need to meet the first 1 per cent of any cost.

A Panel member subsequently emphasised that the police response to an incident was based on the principle that operational need was the first priority.

RESOLVED that: the Panel notes the report.

21/21 Handover to the Police, Fire & Crime Panel for 2021/22

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager presented the report (copies of which had previously been circulated), highlighting the following points:

- The current Panel meeting was the final one before elections to the new Northamptonshire local authorities and for the PFCC role, which could result in changes for the Panel.
- The Panel had previously identified that it would be useful to consider any learning points from its recent experience or similar matters that it wished to highlight to its successor.
- The report summarised the Panel's work during 2020/21 and identified some potential areas for consideration as a possible starting point for discussion.

The Panel considered the report. The Chair noted that the task-and-finish review carried out during July – December 2020 had already considered various aspects of the future operation of the Panel. The shadow authorities had also resolved how the future councillor membership of the Panel should be divided, adopting an equal 5 / 5 split between the two.

Panel members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- Consideration should be given to future arrangements for chairing the Panel and, for example, whether the chair should be rotated between the two Northamptonshire local authorities. The role should be open to all members and it was not healthy for it to be decided on a political basis.

- The Panel should clearly identify what information it needed to carry out its statutory role and ensure that the PFCC understood this.
- Performance information presented to the Panel should reflect its strategic remit. It should give a view of change in the longer term rather than focussing on short term detail.
- The Chair was thanked for her work in the role.
- Performance information should be presented clearly and succinctly, with the use of graphics not just text. The single page overview of NFRS's response to COVID-19 included in the update provided at the current meeting was a good example of this.
- The Panel could consider increasing its number of independent co-opted members.
- Training for Panel members continued to be important.
- The PFCC engaged with and supported the Panel to a good level, as did members of his staff such as the OPFCC Chief Finance Officer.
- It would be useful for the Panel to seek more clarity about performance against Key Performance Indicators, including changes over time and comparisons with the situation in other force areas. Performance information should be presented using the Red / Amber / Green rating format.
- The good relationship between the PFCC and the Panel was welcome and should be maintained.
- The Panel should seek to meet at least annually with the Chief Constable and the Chief Fire Officer in order to engage with them directly.
- Positions of responsibility should be shared amongst Panel members but without losing continuity in the work done.
- Individual Panel members' capacity to take the Chair depended on having the time available to do the role justice.

The PFCC made the following points during the course of discussion:

- The Panel operated more effectively than some of its counterparts, which could seek to act as proxies for the police or fire authority or had members with hidden agendas who only sought to attack the commissioner.
- There were times when he thought the Panel should be scrutinising particular matters and reflected this in the information he provided.
- The review of Police & Crime commissioners would result in an update to the Policing Protocol, which could affect panels.
- The provision of performance information to the Panel should reflect that its role was to hold to account the PFCC, who held to account the force. Information on performance at a specific point in time also needed to reflect the nuances of the overall position appropriately. The review of Police & Crime commissioners set new requirements relating to performance reporting. The provision of information to the Panel would continue to evolve.
- He had previously agreed that the Chief Constable and the Chief Fire Officer should attend annual sessions with the Panel to give an overview of key issues concerning the two organisations.

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager provided additional information in response to points raised by members during the course of discussion as follows:

- He understood that he would still be supporting the Panel in 2021/22.
- The Panel should avoid inadvertently limiting its own flexibility if it sought to change the existing arrangements for selecting the Chair and Deputy Chair. All members were currently eligible for these roles, with the exception that they could not both be held by councillors from the same local authority. Requiring the Chair to be rotated could, for example, mean that a member who carried out the role well could not stay in it.

A Panel member subsequently questioned whether there was scope for the Panel to pay an allowance to independent co-opted members in future, which could be beneficial. The Democratic Services Assistant Manager provided additional information as follows:

- All Panel members were currently able to claim expenses.
- The payment of an allowance would ultimately need to be agreed by the Northamptonshire local authorities, informed by any input from the Panel.
- It would be open to the Panel appointed for 2021/22 to give further consideration to this matter. In doing so it would need to take account of any relevant decisions by the new local authorities, for example on allowances for co-opted committee members in general.

Panel members suggested that the matter should be considered further, as the workload involved in Panel meetings and other supporting activity could justify some remuneration for independent co-opted members. Councillor Pritchard asked for it to be noted that he did not support such action, given that there were other responsible and time-consuming roles such as magistrates that did not carry an allowance. The Chair highlighted that the Panel recommending to its successor that further consideration be given to this matter was not suggesting what conclusion might be reached on it.

RESOLVED that:

a) The Panel recommends that the presentation of performance information to the Panel by the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner in future should reflect the following principles:

- **Performance information should be focussed more on longer term trends than detail in the short term.**
- **Performance information should be presented in a clear format, making use of graphics and Red/Amber/Green ratings where possible.**

b) The Panel recommends that the Police, Fire & Crime Panel appointed for 2021/22 considers the question of whether there should be remuneration for Panel members in future.

22/21 Police, Fire & Crime Panel Meeting Dates 2021/22

The Chair introduced the report (copies of which had previously been circulated), setting out a proposed meeting schedule for 2021/22.

The Chair invited members to raise any points relating to the report that they wished the Panel to consider.

RESOLVED that: the Panel agrees the proposed meeting dates for 2021/22 set out in the report:

- Thursday 17th June 2021
- Thursday 9th September 2021
- Thursday 9th December 2021
- Thursday 3rd February 2022
- Thursday 17th February 2022 (Reserve)
- Thursday 14th April 2022

All meetings to start at 1.00pm

23/21 Future use of Remote Meetings

The Chair introduced the report (copies of which had previously been circulated), highlighting the following points:

- The Panel was asked to support the case being made to the government for extending the ability for panels to hold virtual meetings beyond the current cut-off of 6th May 2021. This would have various benefits, including supporting public engagement.
- It was understood that the government was due to consider its position on this matter shortly.

The Chair invited members to raise any points relating to the report that they wished the Panel to consider.

The PFCC advised that there was a large meeting room at Darby House, which might be used for a Panel meeting in future. This would also enable Panel members to see the base for enabling services.

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager subsequently clarified that the legislation permitting the Panel to hold virtual meetings was due to expire on 6th May 2021. The Panel would therefore not be able to meet remotely after this point unless the law was changed to permit this.

RESOLVED that: the Panel agrees that the Chair should write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government encouraging an extension of the current provisions permitting Police (Fire) & Crime panels to hold remote meetings.

The Chair thanked members for their commitment during what had been a long meeting. The Chair went on to thank members for their previous support and hard work and hoped to see them again in person in future. The Chair also thanked the PFCC for the work he had done in the role to support the interests of Northamptonshire residents.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 5.10pm.

Next scheduled Panel meeting: 17th June 2021 at 1.00pm.

This information can be made available in other formats upon request. Please contact James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager on tel. 07500 605276 or e-mail: jedmunds@northamptonshire.gov.uk