

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME PANEL

REPORT TO THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER

25TH APRIL 2019

Subject:	Review of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's Proposed Fire & Rescue Plan
Recommendations:	That the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner: a) Has regard to this report by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel arising from its review of his proposed Fire & Rescue Plan in accordance with Section 5(6)(d) of the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 as amended by the Policing & Crime Act 2017. b) Gives the Panel a response to this report in accordance with Section 5(6)(e) of the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 as amended by the Policing & Crime Act 2017. c) Reviews his Fire & Rescue Plan in light of recommendations in this report in accordance with Section 5(9) of the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 as amended by the Policing & Crime Act 2017.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report is intended to set out the results of a review by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel of the proposed Fire & Rescue Plan issued by the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Policing & Crime Act 2017 requires the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire ("the Commissioner"), as the fire and rescue authority for the county, to issue a Fire & Rescue Plan. The Fire & Rescue Plan is a document which:
- (a) is prepared and published in accordance with the Fire & Rescue National Framework, and
 - (b) sets out the Commissioner's priorities and objectives, for the period covered by the document, in connection with the discharge of his functions as the fire and rescue authority.
- 2.2 The Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 as amended by the 2017 Act requires the Commissioner to send a proposed Fire & Rescue Plan, or a proposed variation of an existing Plan to the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel ("the Panel") before the Commissioner may issue the Plan.

- 2.3 Upon receipt of a draft Plan or variation of an existing Plan the Panel must:
- (a) review the draft Plan or variation; and
 - (b) make a report or recommendations to the Commissioner on the draft Plan or variation.
- 2.4 The Commissioner must:
- (a) have regard to a report and to any recommendations made by the Panel; and
 - (b) give the Panel a response to its report and to any recommendations in the report.

3. Review of the Proposed Fire & Rescue Plan

- 3.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel met in public on 4th April 2019 to review the Commissioner's proposed Fire & Rescue Plan for 2019-21.
- 3.2 The Commissioner presented the proposed Plan to the Panel, advising that it had three key themes: preventing fires and emergencies; protecting the public; and stabilising Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS). He had set a budget that provided investment in NFRS for the first time in recent years. It was also intended that a culture of continuous improvement and support for the wellbeing of staff in NFRS would support the delivery of the Plan. Public consultation informing the proposed Plan had shown that NFRS was held in high regard in Northamptonshire and that there was also a good level of public support for collaborative working; over 70% of consultation responses supported expanding NFRS activities provided that this did not detract from its core purpose. The Commissioner would consider how best to move in this direction in future. He emphasised that the transfer of governance of NFRS aimed to deliver a public benefit and it was not intended to merge Northamptonshire Police and NFRS. Work was being done to address the outcomes of recent inspection of NFRS by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. Overall, the Commissioner considered that his proposed Plan represented a significant step forward for Northamptonshire and he commended it to the Panel.
- 3.3 The Panel subsequently questioned the Commissioner on key focus areas of the proposed Plan. The Chief Fire Officer of NFRS provided additional supporting information to the Panel during the course of discussion.

Ensuring value for money through efficient and effective use of funding

- 3.4 Panel members welcomed the action being taken by the Commissioner to provide capital funding for NFRS and to build up its financial reserves. The Panel sought a greater understanding of how capital funding would be used to support services in the county, including to replace existing NFRS appliances and to provide for specialised tasks such as fighting fires in high-rise buildings. The Commissioner noted that all local authority fire and rescue services had faced financial pressures in recent years due to reductions in local government funding. Transferring the governance of NFRS would assist in addressing this and he commended Northamptonshire County Council for their work in bringing it about. There remained strict boundaries between the resources available to him for policing and for fire and rescue. The governance change would benefit the two services by helping to bring about greater opportunities for joint-working, such as consolidating a police station and retained fire station in the same area on a

single site. He was currently working through the detail of how the capital funding he had identified for NFRS would be used.

- 3.5 The Panel was subsequently advised that fire appliances were a priority area for capital expenditure as NFRS was operating some vehicles that were 18 years old – three years beyond the lifespan originally set by the service – due to the lack of capital funding in recent years. However, the capital programme also needed to cover other areas, such as NFRS training facilities. Current work was intended to produce an effective capital programme that took account of priorities across NFRS. Existing vehicles and equipment would not simply be replaced on a like-for-like basis: a more considered approach would be taken to equip NFRS for future demands. Panel members supported innovation in relation to the capital programme and looking for opportunities to use new technology that supported community safety or firefighters' wellbeing. The Panel was advised that NFRS already pursued such opportunities to secure external funding, as well as developing a commercial function. The Commissioner also emphasised that the development of 'purple' enabling services and other efficiencies in support functions for both Northamptonshire Police and NFRS were ultimately designed to enable public resources to be used most effectively and to assist in meeting frontline requirements.
- 3.6 The Commissioner was asked to confirm if he had reached a view at that point about the effectiveness of metrics used to assess NFRS performance. The Commissioner advised that he was reviewing this area and working through specific aspects. Arrangements had not yet been finalised. The focus needed to be on setting appropriate minimum standards, which would be done in conjunction with partners such as the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The Commissioner was confident that an effective overall performance management framework would be established.

Adapting responses to meet changing demands

- 3.7 The Panel sought reassurance about the capacity to deliver the proposed standards of operational response set out in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) for 2019-22 and the Commissioner's expectation that these would be improved over time. The Panel was advised that variations in NFRS's average response times since 2012/13 reflected that response times had increased nationally over the past 20 years due to factors such as increased traffic on the roads, new developments with more restricted access, and changes to the location of fire stations. National standards of operational response had ceased to apply in 2004. In 2007 Northamptonshire had set a standard of responding to incidents within 8 minutes of a call being received. This standard had been adopted with a view to linking in with ambulance response times for life-threatening calls. It had been aspirational at the time and the ability to meet it had since been further affected by the impact of austerity. The standard was not being achieved in practice and NFRS had been challenged in inspections for operating a standard that it could not meet. The new IRMP therefore changed the standard to 10 minutes. This reflected the situation in other areas and could be improved in future if desired and appropriate resources were available. The Commissioner wished to set standards that were realistic and clear to the public, recognising that residents were now paying a specific precept for fire and rescue.

Minimising the likelihood and impact of fire in high risk premises

- 3.8 Panel members highlighted potential risks that could be associated with houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) and welcomed that HMOs were identified as a focus area for targeted inspection work by NFRS. They questioned whether NFRS could take a more proactive role at the planning stage in preventing issues relating to HMOs, similarly to the principle of designing out crime. The scope for NFRS officers to link up more with local authorities to identify potential signs of problems in HMOs was also highlighted. The Panel was advised that Northamptonshire Police and NFRS operated a joint design advice function, which reviewed planning applications from both perspectives. NFRS could send out vehicles to carry out practical tests if there were concerns about access or similar issues relating to a new development. NFRS did not have enforcement powers but certainly did make recommendations to local planning authorities on specific applications.
- 3.9 The Panel went on to emphasise the benefit that would result from a requirement to install sprinklers in facilities where fire could present a particular risk, such as schools, residential care facilities or large commercial premises. The Panel expressed support for the principle that sprinklers should be fitted as standard in new-builds and considered that there was scope for the Panel to assist in making the case for this to the government. The Commissioner advised that he was already in correspondence with the government about national requirements relating to the installation of sprinklers. There was a case for enhancing existing requirements both to protect life and property.

Reducing fires and accidents in the home

- 3.10 The Panel noted that people over the age of 65 years were particularly at risk from fatalities in dwelling fires and questioned how NFRS could act to target this group specifically, as well as seeking a greater understanding of how NFRS worked to prevent incidents in the home more generally. The Panel was advised that NFRS worked with partners such as NHS organisations to identify people who might be at particular risk, such as older people living alone. They were then prioritised for home fire safety checks and similar activities such as Safe & Well wellbeing visits. The fact that NFRS was now represented directly on the Northamptonshire Health & Wellbeing Board put it in a better position to highlight how it could contribute to supporting wellbeing in the county.

Developing modern and flexible ways of working to meet community needs

- 3.11 Panel members commended the range of activities that NFRS carried out beyond fighting fires. The value of co-responding and the work of the Arson Task Force were particularly highlighted. The Panel was advised that both of these areas of work were intended to be part of NFRS's future activity.
- 3.12 A Panel member emphasised that the IRMP made clear the level of demand on NFRS. It should continue to operate as a countywide fire and rescue service. However, in a rural county with whole-time and retained crewed fire stations it was not guaranteed that an appliance would be available on-the-run from every location at every possible time. This should be made clear to the public. At the same time, the Commissioner and NFRS needed to plan effectively for future demands in Northamptonshire resulting from overall growth or more specific issues such as the impact of new strategic rail freight

interchange facilities off the M1 that were currently waiting for government approval. The Commissioner expressed confidence that the IRMP developed for 2019-22 was well-founded. He went on to advise that there were no significant plans to close fire stations in the county although opportunities to improve station locations would be considered, including where this would support retained crewing. More innovative work by NFRS in different areas could also make retained service even more worthwhile, which, in turn, would help to enhance availability and support response times. The Panel was further advised that forward planning by NFRS took account of a range of factors that could affect its future operating environment including local growth. Fire and rescue services were now dealing with a significantly greater range of tasks than in the past: current discussion at national level about how this should be reflected in firefighters' terms and conditions would have an impact on future national resource requirements. Fire and rescue services were also currently making a case to be given similar precept flexibility to police forces to assist in managing future demands.

Communicating clearly and giving people the opportunity to influence the service

- 3.13 A Panel member noted that the FBU's response to consultation on the IRMP appeared as an appendix and suggested that it should be treated in a more integrated way in future. The Commissioner advised that all firefighters' responses had been integrated into the summary of consultation results: the FBU's response was in addition to individual responses and had been set out in the summary document to highlight this.

4. Outcomes of the Review

- 4.1 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel agreed the following resolutions:
- (a) That the Panel supports the proposed Fire & Rescue Plan and the overall direction it sets out.**
 - (b) That the Panel encourages the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner to work in partnership with local housing authorities on safety issues connected with houses of multiple occupation.**
 - (c) That the Panel supports the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner in lobbying government to require the installation of sprinklers in new build schools as standard.**
 - (d) That the Panel seeks to scrutinise progress with the delivery of the Fire & Rescue Plan through 2019/20.**

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Background Papers:	Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Policing & Crime Act 2017 The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (Fire and Rescue Authority) Order 2018 Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel Rules of Procedure