

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held in Committee Room 1 at County Hall, Chelmsford on Thursday 28 September 2023

**Present:**

**Councillor**

Anthony Hedley  
Mary Cunningham  
Jay Laplain (Substitute)  
Russ Savage  
Donna Eley  
Ian Grundy (Substitute)  
Mike Garnett  
Simon Burwood  
Lisa Newport  
James Courtenay  
Gina Placey  
Maggie Sutton  
Aidan McGurran

**Representing**

Basildon Borough Council  
Braintree District Council  
Brentwood Borough Council  
Castle Point Borough Council  
Chelmsford City Council  
Essex County Council  
Harlow District Council  
Maldon District Council  
Rochford District Council  
Southend-on-Sea City Council  
Tendring Council  
Uttlesford District Council  
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment

**Co-opted Independent Members**

John Gili-Ross (Chairman)

**Also in attendance**

Gemma Bint	Democratic Services Officer
Pippa Brent-Isherwood	Chief Executive, Office of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC)
Sophie Campion	Senior Democratic Services Officer, Secretary to the Panel
Jane Gardner	Deputy Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)
Darren Horsman	Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement, OPFCC
Rick Hylton	Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Andy Prophet	Deputy Chief Constable
Emma Tombs	Democratic Services Manager

**1 Membership, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

The report of the Membership, Apologies and Declarations was received.

1. The membership of the Panel was noted.
2. The following apologies were noted:
  - Cllr Jude Deakin
  - Cllr Ross Playle, Essex County Council – Substitute is Cllr Ian Grundy
  - Cllr Gary Collins, Thurrock Council

- Cllr Barry Aspinell, Brentwood Borough Council – Substitute is Cllr Jay Laplain

3. The following declarations were made by Members:

- For the purposes of transparency Councillor Simon Burwood advised that his daughter was currently a serving Essex police officer. Councillor Burwood participated fully in the meeting.

## **2 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **3 Questions to the Chairman from members of the Public**

There were none.

## **4 Balanced Appointment Objective Report**

The Panel received report EPFCP/22/23 which provided an update on the proposed nominees received from the Essex Labour Group and Essex Conservative Group for the balanced appointment co-options to the Panel.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman expressed thanks to Cllr Jude Deakin, for her contributions to the work of the Panel during her time as a co-opted member for balanced appointment.

### **Resolved:**

- That the co-opted members of the panel to achieve the balanced appointment objective were with immediate effect Councillor Aidan McGurran (Labour) and Councillor Frankie Ricci (Conservative)
- That the co-options remain in place until co-options for the 2024-25 year are made.
- To note that Cllr Jude Deakin had ceased to be a member of the Panel.

## **5 Essex County Fire and Rescue Service Annual Report and Statement of Assurance 2022-23**

The Panel received report EPFCP/23/23 which provided the Panel with the draft Essex County Fire and Rescue Service Annual Report and Statement of Assurance 2022-2023.

The Panel had a statutory duty to review and provide feedback on the draft Statement of Assurance.

The Commissioner introduced the report and drew attention to some of the challenges of the past year such as the rise in the number of incidents related to the summer heat wave and the increase in the number of false alarms. The Commissioner advised the Panel that the HMICFRS report on Essex County

Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) had been received a year after the inspection had been carried out, the report had highlighted some areas that required improvement, but had also recognised and acknowledged the improvements already made. A further inspection was being undertaken at the time of the meeting and the Commissioner was confident that further improvements would be recognised. It was seen as a constructive process. Attention was also drawn to some of the highlights of the past year which included a significant increase in the number of home safety visits undertaken, recruitment of new talent, work to embed and promote the right values and culture and the receipt of a national award recognising the work towards inclusion.

During the discussion, the Panel asked questions and sought clarification on the following issues:

- Fires relating to the charging of e-vehicles – it was explained that currently the number of e-vehicle fires was low and was not separately recorded within the incident statistics. Nationally there was work being done to understand the different risks with e-vehicles and in particular battery charging. There was also work being done to understand the required practices for putting out these types of fire which had different risks. The biggest concern with e-scooters was the number of injuries and deaths per travelled kilometre associated with them. Conclusions and recommendations from the results of the pilot scheme in Essex would be considered when they were made available.
- Risks associated with electric charging points on a fuelling station forecourt – it was noted that not all planning and development departments formally consult the Fire and Rescue Service on this type of planning application. The Commissioner advised that on a national level there was lobbying to the Government regarding a requirement to formally consult Fire and Rescue Services (FRS). The Chief Fire Officer explained that the FRS was not currently a statutory consultee, but there was a Private Members Bill relating to this issue. The National Fire Chief's Council had issued some policy guidance to local planners to encourage early consultation and mitigations. It was explained that currently any consultation on an application was on a case by case basis.
- Risks of fires from e-cigarettes and vapes – it was reported that an increase in the counterfeit market caused additional risk. Charging was one of the biggest risks of fire. There was a campaign called 'Charge Safe' led by the London Fire Brigade. This was still an emerging issue in Essex. It was noted that there was also risk from the disposal of lithium batteries from within these products.

The Panel made the following suggestion to the Commissioner:

- Whether information and guidance on the issue and risks of batteries within products such as e-cigarettes and vapes, could be provided in relevant newsletters and communications from the Fire and Rescue Service, to provide better public awareness.

**Resolved:**

That members of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel noted the draft Essex County Fire and Rescue Service Annual Report and Statement of Assurance 2022-2023 and provided feedback to the Commissioner.

**6 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Annual Report 2022-23**

The Panel received report EPFCP/24/23 which provided the Panel with the PFCC's draft Annual Report for 2022-2023.

The Panel had a statutory duty under section 28(4) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to review and provide feedback to the Commissioner on the Annual Report.

The Commissioner introduced the report and drew the Panel's attention to the completed growth programme, with the service currently being the largest it had been in its 184 year history. The Commissioner highlighted areas of success in reducing crime and disorder and improving on prosecution rates. Attention was also drawn to additional funding for specific interventions such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Hotspots which were working well.

The Commissioner reflected on events in the past year which had required a response such as the Just Stop Oil protests. The service had also contributed to the national mourning leading up to the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

As a result of investments and innovative interventions, the level of trust and confidence in Essex Police had sustained at a consistent level. This was in the context of national media relating to incidents that had occurred in other police services, with their levels of confidence and trust in the police having been affected. The Commissioner drew attention to the professionalism programme that was in place in Essex and the work being done by Essex Police.

During the discussion, the Panel asked questions and sought clarification on the following issues:

- The Panel noted the impact on Essex Police of national policing issues and also the role of Essex Police in providing its contributions to the Strategic Policing Requirement. The Commissioner was asked whether there were any concerns relating to the national issue regarding Metropolitan Police Firearms Officers stepping back from their armed duties and support being brought in by armed officers from other UK Police Services. The Commissioner assured the Panel that the Chief Constable was engaged with the armed units in Essex and the service was supportive of the risk taken by those officers on a daily basis. It was explained that it was voluntary to carry a firearm and could therefore be ceased, but that had not happened up to this point in Essex. The Commissioner gave an example of an incident where the firearms unit had made an armed intervention and the perpetrators had been brought to justice.

- In response to a question relating to the actual numbers of police officers and how this compared to other peaks within the service, it was explained that per capita, this was about the same number as the previous peak. However that peak had been a reaction to national economic circumstances at the time had not been sustained. The current numbers were well ahead of the previous sustained peak. It was acknowledged that a number of the new recruits were still in training and not yet at the point of independent patrol, however over the next two years there would be an increase in deployable officers and specific skills would be developed. There would still be a turnover due to leavers and those retiring.
- It was explained that in the past there had been certain skill shortages, but there was a workforce plan in place, it was acknowledged that more detectives were needed to be trained, but there were no immediate skill gaps. The Deputy Chief Constable explained that whilst there were ebbs and flows, this was monitored on a monthly basis and skills would be developed as the new officers matured in the roles.

**Resolved:**

That members of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel noted the draft Annual Report for 2022-2023 and provided feedback to the Commissioner.

**7 2024/25 Budget**

The Panel received report EPFCP/25/23 which out the background issues, the current assumptions, and the challenges in setting the 2024/25 budgets for both Essex Police and Essex Fire and Rescue Service.

The Commissioner introduced the report. The Panel's attention was drawn to the current planning assumptions and the movement in the Medium Term Financial Strategy for Essex Police, from a balanced position reported in February 2023 to an adverse change of £6.8m for the 2024/25 budget, following a review of the key assumptions.

The Fire and Rescue service adjustments to the assumptions were set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. It was noted that the 2023/24 pay award for non-operational staff was still to be settled. A projected £200k deficit was forecast for 2024/25 based on the current review of assumptions. The way in which the pay settlements were agreed for the Fire and Rescue Services was explained and it was noted that because they are negotiated by the National Joint Council, therefore the Government was not obliged to fund the increases.

In response to questions from the Panel the following points were raised:

- It was noted that the public precept survey got an average of 2-3k responses each year which was at the higher end in comparison to other areas. The first year of the survey had a higher response of around 5k.
- The Government sets the pay level for the police and therefore had a commitment to provide funding. It was clarified that there was funding from the Government for the current agreed police pay increase.

However in Essex this was not fully funded, due to the way in which the police funding formula worked. The funding formula was weighted to more urban areas and so there was less funding in places such as Essex, leading to a small gap in the funding of the pay increases.

- The Chairman noted that Panel Members had found the Budget Setting Working Group very helpful in previous years, for providing a good insight and understanding into the budget setting process.

**Resolved:**

That the Panel noted the background issues, the current assumptions, and challenges, in setting the 2024/25 budgets for Essex Police and Essex Fire and Rescue Service

## **8 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Decisions Reports**

The Panel received report EPFCP/26/23 which provided information about financial and strategic decisions made by the PFCC.

### **Appendix A – Police Decisions**

- Ref 127-23 Specials Recruitment Plan and Delivery
- Ref 119-23 Deed of Variation to modify the Contract for Sale for the former Harlow MIT and Transport Workshop

**Resolved:**

That the Panel received and noted the report.

## **9 The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to update the Panel on any ongoing issues**

The Commissioner provided the Panel with a verbal update on ongoing issues:

- The HMICFRS Inspection of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
- The Passing Out parades that were taking place for the recent recruits
- Opening of the new Shoeburyness Fire Station
- Safer Streets fund submissions
- Applications for local Safer Streets funding
- Changes to legislation regarding blades and weapons.

An anti-social behaviour issue was raised regarding issues relating to the use of Nitrous Oxide. It was noted that any changes to legislation that may be made with regard to the selling and possession of it, would be planned for and broadly welcomed to address the issues.

**Resolved:**

That the verbal report was noted.

## **10 National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels Update**

The Panel received a verbal update from the Chairman of the Panel, which included an update on recent meetings and future workstreams, the AGM to be held in November and meetings with the Home Office and Local Government Association.

Some of the current workstreams included a member of the association starting an open dialogue with the Policing College and dealing with requests from Panels around best practice and current issues. The Chairman expressed his thanks to Emma Tombs for her work in support of the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels. It was explained that the support was provided by the host authority of the member elected as Chairman of the association.

### **Resolved:**

That the verbal report was noted.

## **11 Forward Work Plan**

The Panel received report EPFCP/27/23 setting out the planned business of the Panel.

It was proposed by the Chairman that an item be added to the Forward Work Plan to look at the Commissioner's wider role relating to criminal justice. This suggestion was seconded by Cllr James Courtenay. The item having been proposed and seconded, was agreed by the Panel to be added to the Forward Work Plan.

### **Resolved:**

That the Panel received and noted the Forward Work Plan, agreeing the addition of an item to look at the Commissioner's wider role relating to criminal justice.

## **12 Dates of Future Meetings**

The Panel received report EPFCP/28/22 informing Members of the remaining meeting dates for 2023-24 and set out the proposed meeting dates for 2024-25.

### **Resolved:**

That the future meeting dates were noted.

## **13 Date of Next Meeting**

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 7 December 2023.

There being no urgent business, the meeting closed at 3:46pm.