

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel Meeting Confirmation Hearing, held in the Chamber of County Hall, Chelmsford on Thursday 3 February 2022

Present:

Councillor

Daniel Lawrence
Frankie Ricci
Godfrey Isaacs (Chairman)
Paul Stalker
Ross Playle
Michael Garnett
Ian Shead
Lynda McWilliams
Gary Collins
Maggie Sutton
Jude Deakin
Aidan McGurran
Lee Scordis

Representing

Basildon Borough Council
Braintree District Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council
Essex County Council
Harlow District Council
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Tendring District Council
Thurrock Council
Uttlesford District Council
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment

Co-opted Independent Members

Sheila Murphy

Also in attendance

Gemma Bint	Democratic Services Officer
Pippa Brent-Isherwood	Chief Executive, Office of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Sophie Campion	Senior Democratic Services Officer, Secretary to the Panel
Annette Chan	Essex Police
Neil Cross	Chief Finance Officer, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Jane Gardner	Deputy Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Ben-Julian Harrington	Chief Constable, Essex Police
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Darren Horsman	Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement
Nathan Hutchinson	Essex Police
Rick Hylton	Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Debbie Martin	Essex Police
Janet Perry	Candidate

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

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

1. The membership of the Panel was noted, including changes since the last meeting and the correction of an error with regard to the appointed

representative from Uttlesford District Council being Councillor Maggie Sutton.

2. The Panel welcomed three new members, co-opted for balanced appointment:
 - Councillor Deakin
 - Councillor McGurran
 - Councillor Scordis
3. The following apologies were noted:
 - John Gili-Ross, Chairman
 - Councillor Andrew Baggott, Basildon Borough Council, for whom Councillor Daniel Lawrence substituted
 - Councillor Beverley Oxford, Colchester Borough Council
 - Councillor Jeremy Lager, Chelmsford Borough Council
 - Councillor Keith Barber, Brentwood Borough Council
 - Councillor Arthur Williams, Rochford District Council
 - Councillor Mark Heard, Maldon District Council
4. The following declarations were made by Members:
 - Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest as her son was a serving police officer. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.
 - Councillor Frankie Ricci declared a Code Interest as his son was a serving police officer in Essex. Councillor Ricci participated fully in the meeting.

2 Urgent Business

In the opinion of the Chairman, there were no matters that should be considered in public by reason of special circumstances as a matter of urgency.

3 Proposed Designation of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Chief Finance (Section 151) Officer

The Committee considered report EPFCP/01/22 which set out that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) is required always to have in place a Chief Finance Officer (CFO) to be responsible for the proper administration of their financial affairs, who must be a member of an accountancy body specified in section 113 of the Local Government Act 1998.

Following the recent resignation of the current Chief Finance Officer, the PFCC now needed to designate an alternative CFO to assume these statutory responsibilities with effect from 16 March 2022.

The Commissioner provided a brief outline of the background to the situation and the need to designate a new Chief Finance Officer. The Commissioner explained that the current role of Chief Finance (Section 151) Officer was

fulfilled by the Head of Finance who reported to the Strategic Head of Performance and Resources. The Head of Finance had recently resigned from the role and the PFCC together with the Head of Paid Service and senior management team had reviewed the situation and were satisfied that there was an existing member of the senior management team who was qualified to provide the level of financial support required and therefore the Commissioner proposed to designate the existing Strategic Head of Performance and Resources to Chief Finance (Section 151) Officer.

The Commissioner went on to explain that Mrs Perry had been in post for 18 months and had been recruited through a very robust selection process with outstanding feedback. The Commissioner considered that she was very well qualified for the role and was already responsible for providing strategic advice and guidance on all aspects of financial management and performance and supported the Commissioner and Section 151 officers from Essex Police and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service to develop the overall financial strategy. The proposed designation was considered to be a natural extension of her current role.

The Commissioner gave a brief outline of Mrs Perry's suitability for the role. As this would be an additional responsibility for Mrs Perry, the Commissioner outlined his proposed plan for providing support to Mrs Perry in this role, through the creation of two additional posts and realigning some of her existing responsibilities to ensure that she has the capacity for the role.

The hearing then focused on the capability, expertise, professional competence and personal independence of the candidate for this role.

The Chairman invited Mrs Perry to address the Panel and respond to questions.

Mrs Perry thanked the Commissioner for the introduction and thanked the Panel for considering the designation of this role. Mrs Perry gave a brief overview of her career and her values with regard to public services and in particular emergency services. She highlighted aspects of her current role which she considered placed her well for this additional role and felt it was an appropriate move to bring the Section 151 responsibilities into this role.

The Panel asked a number of questions to assess Mrs Perry's suitability for the role in terms of professional competence and personal independence and the process for the proposed designation of the role. The following responses were provided to questions raised:

- The role was an on-going contract and not subject to a fixed term.
- The findings of the Financial Management Capability Review (FMCRC) carried out by CIPFA in 2020 had identified that the positioning of the Chief Finance Officer role was sub-optimal and recommended review. It was clarified that there had been two very senior officers at that level which provided more capacity than was optimal and having reviewed the situation, it was concluded that going forward with the capacity required this could be provided in a more efficient way.

- Mrs Perry outlined some of the projects that she had managed, demonstrating her skills and capabilities relevant to the role.
- The Commissioner explained that there were likely to be changes in the Local Government landscape in the future. However, at the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner there was exciting work ongoing and there was engagement and motivation from the workforce. Mrs Perry expressed her commitment to her role going forward.
- Mrs Perry identified the financial climate with efficiencies and savings and the prevention strategies in both services as the challenging areas going forward. However, Mrs Perry considered that the processes for delivering efficiencies and savings were very good and she was confident that the organisation would continue to deliver the budget in line.

4 Deliberation on Confirmation Hearing for the Proposed Designation of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Chief Finance (Section 151) Officer

It was proposed and **RESOLVED** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the deliberation stage, on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person).

The press and public left the meeting at this point.

5 Outcome of the Confirmation Hearing for the Proposed Designation of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Chief Finance (Section 151) Officer

The Panel considered the proposed designation and unanimously **RESOLVED** to recommend to the PFCC that he proceed in designating Mrs Janet Perry to the position of Chief Finance (Section 151) Officer. The Chairman would write to the PFCC to confirm this, by way of a letter.

6 There being no urgent exempt business, the meeting closed at 2.30pm.

Chairman
22 March 2022