

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Chelmsford on Tuesday, 22 March 2022

Present:

Councillor

Frankie Ricci
Keith Barber
Jeremy Lager
Paul Stalker
Mark Heard
Ian Shead
Lynda McWilliams
Gary Collins
Aidan McGurran
Lee Scordis

Representing

Braintree District Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Chelmsford City Council
Epping Forest District Council
Maldon District Council
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Tendring District Council
Thurrock Council
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment

Co-opted Independent Members

John Gili-Ross (Chairman)
Sheila Murphy

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)
Rick Hylton	Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

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.
2. The following apologies were noted:
 - Cllr Garnett, Harlow District Council
 - Cllr Oxford, Colchester Borough Council
 - Cllr Baggott, Basildon Borough Council
 - Cllr Playle, Essex County Council
 - Cllr Deakin, Co-opted Member for Balance Appointment
 - Cllr Isaacs, CastlePoint Borough Council
 - Cllr Sutton, Uttlesford District Council
 - Cllr Williams, Rochford District Council

There were also apologies from Neil Cross, ECFRS and Chief Constable Harrington

3. The following declarations were made by Members:

- Councillor Mark Heard declared a Code Interest as his son was currently a serving police officer. Councillor Heard participated fully in the meeting.
- Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest as her son was currently a serving police officer. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.
- Councillor Frankie Ricci declared a Code Interest as his step-son was currently a serving police officer. Councillor Ricci participated fully in the meeting.

2 Minutes

- a) The minutes of the confirmation hearing meeting held on the 3 February 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
- b) The minutes of the meeting held on the 3 February 2022 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 Essex County Fire and Rescue Service - Quarter 2 Performance Report 2021-2022

The Panel received report EPFCP/04/22 which provided an overview of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's (ECFRS's) progress in delivering the priorities set out in the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019 – 2024 and the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-2024, based on data and other information for the period July 2021 to September 2021.

The Commissioner introduced the report, drawing attention to a number of key points in the report, including the decrease in the number of fires attended, the increase in attendances to other specialist services, the attendance at false alarms and increase in malicious calls. The Commissioner highlighted the significant increase in Safe and Well visits and reported that the diversity of the service continued to improve. Areas of challenge were availability of fire fighters, attendance times and the number of audits of high risk and very high risk premises. There was also an increase in road safety fatalities and seriously injured. The service remained focussed on succession planning.

In response to questions and concerns raised by the Panel the following points were made:

False Alarms and Malicious calls

Members of the Panel were particularly concerned with the increase in false alarms and malicious calls. It was explained that a root and branch review was

being undertaken with regard to the causes of unwanted fire signals. There were some inconsistencies in the way information was captured which was being addressed. The aim was to be more consistent in the approach to ascertaining whether calls were genuine and challenging where appropriate. There was also recognition that some calls had been made with good intent and ensuring that the service was attending where necessary was vital, especially for high-risk premises and life risk. With the number of automatic fire detection alarm systems in place, it was reasonable to expect that there would be a threshold of activations. Work needed to be done with those premises where it was not being managed effectively. The point regarding prosecutions being a possible deterrent for malicious calls was taken on board. Enforcement action was taken and notices had been served with regard to taking better responsible care of systems.

Who investigated a malicious call would depend on the call and often the outcome would be education or sometimes enforcement. Costing these incidents had not been done at this stage but could be done if the level of activity were so high that it needed to be managed more precisely. If there was a particular localised issue there may be opportunities to address that through the Community Safety Partnerships with localised messages and education.

Attendance times and availability

A number of concerns were raised with regard to the average response times and availability of appliances. In response it was explained that some on-call stations were not available all of the time. However, there was dynamic deployment, with strategic stations across the County which were available. If there had been a deployment over 25mins that was looked into. The more relevant measure was considered to be whether stations were available when they were expected to be, rather than all of the time.

With regard to average response time targets, it was noted there was further work to do, however the Commissioner also considered other indicators such as numbers of people killed and seriously injured and levels of economic damage. Getting tenders to the right place to minimise these was key. There had been an improvement over time, however during this reporting period some factors related to the pandemic were present. Previously during lockdown periods there had been reduced road traffic accidents and reduced number of home fires and more on-call availability. However, since then activity levels had risen and with many on-call firefighters no longer working from home, availability for on-call work was impacted. This was a reversion back to 2019 trend lines. Some on-call tenders were key and needed to be covered, others were part of the dynamic deployment and would be a back-up to the key station.

Recruitment, Diversity and Workforce

Issues were raised regarding the aging profile and succession planning. It was reported that there had been no recruitment for nine years prior to the current Commissioner taking over governance of the Fire and Rescue Service, which had led to an aging profile, however this had been addressed straight away. The profile was improving over time but balanced with retaining expertise. There were no issues with attracting applicants.

There had been work to re-scope the on-call development programme and the service had recruited more on-call firefighters than they had ever done in the last year. Retention of on-call firefighters was also being looked at.

In response to a question regarding what more could be done to improve diversity, the Commissioner confirmed that it was important to him that the Fire and Rescue service was open to all and there was an active programme of positive action recruitment. It was acknowledged that some fire and rescue services had succeeded in becoming an employer of aspiration for people from an ethnic minority community. It was recognised in Essex that more positive action was required, particularly in the on-call area.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the employee relation cases included attendance relating to sickness, grievances and performance.

Working with Partners

A member of the Panel asked how the Fire and Rescue service could better integrate within the Community Safety Partnerships. It was noted that there was a link particularly regarding supporting the vulnerable and with safety of residents. One of the priorities of the Chief Fire Officer was to integrate the service better with the partnerships and ensure that their purpose and role was clear.

There was collaboration between the Fire and Rescue Service and Police Service on the area of deliberate fires and arson, of which the Firestoppers was a part. There were two categories, primary deliberate fires, affecting life and property and secondary fires. There was a fire intervention scheme to educate young people. For the purposes of incidents of arson, there was joint fire investigation with Essex Police.

The Joint Education Steering Board was made up of the Fire and Rescue service and Police service working together to provide community safety messages as a joint team through education and schools.

Safeguarding

It was recognised that vulnerable people were particularly at risk from hazard and investment and improvements in the way the service worked with partners in this area had been done. It was seen as positive that more vulnerabilities were being recognised and addressed, although it was not known whether this had actually increased, had been deferred due to lockdown or whether more cases were being identified due to improved partnership working. There was a target of 90% of referrals being dealt with within 28 days and in that period 98% had been achieved, with operational crews assisting with delivery and building capacity.

Road Safety and Fire Bike

The value of the Fire Bike scheme was recognised and the service had sought to expand the number of people trained to provide Fire Bike training. All trainers

were ROSPA trained. The move from time off in lieu to secondary contracts was to ensure sustainability.

A contribution had been made to Vision Zero and the launch was the following month. The benefits and outcomes of those interventions would be seen in due course. There was a future aim to have vehicle manufacturers represented, covering all road users.

The Panel requested further information on a number of issues, which the Commissioner agreed to provide after the meeting:

- Detail on the increase in hazardous materials incidents
- Fuller detail on incidents where response times were over 25mins
- Timeline of the review of causation factors for pumping appliance availability
- Impact of long Covid in managing longer term sickness

It was also suggested that consideration be given to the readability and formatting of the report in future.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

5 Police Complaints Reviews

The Panel received report EPFCP/05/22 which provided an overview of the Commissioner's activities during 2021 in relation to complaint handling.

The Commissioner introduced the report, drawing attention to a number of issues highlighted in the report including; key findings of the independent public perception survey, the growing demand for complaint reviews across the country and the backlog in Essex and how that was being addressed.

In response to questions and concerns raised by the Panel the following points were made:

- It was clarified that there had been 167 requests received since February 2021. In the last 12 months 186 had been closed which included those carried over from the backlog.
- It was confirmed that recommendations and organisational learning points were fed back to the complainant, but not incidental findings. Recommendations made to Essex Police were not on a timeframe as the force respond and advise on a timeframe. Sometimes there may be a particular recommendation that is within a timeline.
- A breakdown in future reports was requested to show complaint reviews closed due to being invalid and those going through to full completion.
- The transfer of responsibility for complaint reviews from the Chief Constable to the Commissioner had led to an increase to more reviews than anticipated and the resourcing was not currently sufficient and

therefore further investment had been made. More was being invested during the next year to deal with the backlog. Reassurance was given regarding the quality of the reviews through independent internal audits. The increase in the number upheld and the increase in recommendations made to the force demonstrated a thorough and robust process. The IOPC also scrutinised the process.

- Concern was acknowledged regarding the health and wellbeing of people involved in the complaint and review, due to the time taken to complete the entire process. The additional investment should improve matters. It was confirmed that it would be unusual for a Police Officer to be taken off front line duty as a result of a review, unless it was found that the original complaint had not been dealt with properly. Any conduct matters would have been dealt with as part of the original complaint process by the force. The review was not a re-investigation of the complaint, it was a consideration and conclusion as to whether the handling of it by the force had been reasonable and proportionate.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

6 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Decisions Report

The Panel received report EPFCP/06/22 which provided information about financial and strategic decisions made by the PFCC.

It was suggested that moving the location of knife bins on a regular basis could make them more successful. The Commissioner agreed to consider the suggestion.

A query was raised with regard to the cost of producing the precept leaflets which were sent out with the Council Tax bills. In response it was explained that this was considered to be very important with regard to accountability and public scrutiny of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, particularly with regard to how precept money would be spent. The overall cost was kept to a minimum by working efficiently with District and Borough Councils.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

7 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 key findings from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Review Part 2
- Consultations on the outcomes from the PCC Review Part 2 and the Policing Protocol Order from the PCC Review Part 1

- HMICFRS Annual State of Policing Report
- Further funding had been secured for support of victims of domestic and sexual abuse, which would be invested in independent domestic violence advisors and sexual abuse advisors.
- The bidding window was open for the fourth round of the Safer Streets Funding Programme. The Commissioner was looking to work with Councils to bring forward programmes to submit. However, the funding required 50% match funding from bidders.

Councillor Barber wished to put on record his thanks to the Commissioner for assistance with the work of the Brentwood CSP.

A query was raised regarding the use of social media to report crimes and how the Commissioner might assist with communication regarding how people should be reporting crime. The Commissioner agreed to consider this issue.

Resolved:

That the verbal report was noted.

8 National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels (NAPFCP) update

The Panel received a verbal update from the Chairman of the Panel on the current workstreams of the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels.

The Chairman raised the following points:

- A series of training sessions for Panels had been run on behalf of the Home Office by Dods Group as an outcome from the PCC Review Part 1.
- The Police Foundation Strategic Review of Policing outcome.
- Part of the remit of the NAPFCP was to deal with the public awareness of Panels and the Chairman had been asked to present on community safety with the Nottinghamshire PCC to the Parish and Town Council sector.

Resolved:

That the verbal report was noted.

9 Forward Work Plan

The Panel received report EPFCP/07/22 setting out the planned business of the Panel.

Following a number of questions raised over previous Panel meetings on the subject of E-scooters, the Panel discussed whether to take a focussed look at the issues raised. It was noted that consideration would need to be given to the timescales of the current E-scooter pilot in Essex.

Resolved:

That the Panel received the report, agreeing the addition of a focussed look at the issue of E-scooters as an area of particular concern highlighted by Panel Members.

10 Date of Next Meeting

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 23 June 2022.

There being no urgent business, the meeting closed at 4.56pm.