

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held in Committee Room 1 at County Hall, Chelmsford on Thursday 21 July 2022

**Present:**

**Councillor**

Frankie Ricci  
Keith Barber  
Russ Savage  
Mike Lilley  
Paul Stalker  
Ross Playle  
Mike Garnett  
Mark Heard  
Ian Shead  
Lynda McWilliams  
Gary Collins  
Jude Deakin  
Aidan McGurran

**Representing**

Braintree District Council  
Brentwood Borough Council  
Castle Point Borough Council  
Colchester Borough Council  
Epping Forest District Council  
Essex County Council  
Harlow District Council  
Maldon District Council  
Southend-on-Sea City Council  
Tendring District Council  
Thurrock Council  
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment  
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**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
BJ Harrington	Chief Constable, Essex Police
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)
Rick Hylton	Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
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 Lager, Chelmsford City Council
  - Cllr Dadds, Basildon Borough Council
  - Cllr Williams, Rochford District Council
  - Cllr Sutton, Uttlesford District Council

3. The following declarations were made by Members:
  - Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest as her son was currently a serving police officer and her granddaughter was a serving special police officer. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.
  - Councillor Mark Heard declared a Code Interest as his son was currently a serving police officer. Councillor Heard 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**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 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 4 Performance Report 2021-22**

The Panel received report EPFCP/20/22 which provided an overview of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's progress in delivering the priorities set out in the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024 and the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-2024 during the final quarter of 2021/22.

The Commissioner introduced the report and paid tribute to the Chief Fire Officer and the Fire Service for their response to the recent heat wave.

The Commissioner set the context to the performance report and drew attention to highlights and areas for improvement during quarter 4.

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

- False Alarms – call challenge was used to assess the threat. Specific premises, such as NHS sites, would be responded to due to the nature of the premises. The number of false alarms from automatic fire alarms had decreased from the previous quarter. Sanctions could be used against repeat offenders as set out under the Fire Safety Order. However, it was recognised that many of the calls were made with good intent from members of the public. The cost of responding to each false alarm had not been individually costed.
- Special Services and community engagement – It was confirmed that the Special Services provided by the Fire Service were the activities undertaken beyond attending fires and were undertaken by frontline fire-

fighters. The collaboration work with partners was particularly focussed on prevention work rather than responding to incidents. It was clarified that Fire Service attendance at identified anti-social behaviour hotspots was not in relation to responding to police reported incidents, it was about reaching vulnerable people to undertake prevention work. and helping people to avoid coming to harm. It was hoped that this would reduce criminal activity.

- It was confirmed that data comparisons were being done with 2019 figures as these provided the best comparison as the pre- pandemic position.
- Clarification was provided where some figures compared different reporting periods. The fourth quarter had seen a 24% increase in primary fires compared with the same quarter in the previous year. The increase in secondary fires included things such as outdoor structures, grassland, woodland and crops.
- In response to queries regarding fires involving the charging of e-scooters and e-bikes, it was explained that nationally there had been an increase but there was no specific data on this in Essex. There were risk factors to take into account with charging generally and in particular fires related to non-reputable charging devices.
- Total Pumping Appliance Availability – In response to queries regarding being well under the 94% target, it was explained that this related to crewing, in particular on-call crewing, and the biggest impact was a lack of more qualified drivers. There was an on-call development programme which aimed to ensure that trained drivers were retained. It was also noted that in some on-call areas the target of 94% was unrealistic and in some areas that level of availability was not critical due to dynamic deployment. The targets for those areas needed to be more realistic in the future and would be addressed through the next Integrated Risk Management Plan.
- Recruitment – it was clarified that appointments to particular posts in the report were all funded within budget and that recruitment to vacancies was on track and regularly monitored. Targeted advertising took place with regard to diversity to ensure the service was reflective of the community. There were some issues with retention particularly on-call due to choice within the labour market and that due to the nature of on-call it did not provide a regular income. This was being considered. There was an awareness of future pension and retirement considerations in retention of whole-time fire-fighters.
- Sickness absence – in response to questions regarding the levels of sickness absence in the control room it was explained that it had been essentially covered through re-deployment and re-designation of duty. It was explained that Covid had had a significant impact that had been managed but that pressure had now eased. A Government Covid grant had been received to enable the service to respond during that period and the majority was used to bolster the control room. Due to the relatively small number of staff in the control room it had more of an impact on the percentage figures.
- Impact of Covid – there had been a lot of work to ensure that crews were bubbled properly and tribute was paid to the senior management team for

the way in which they had implemented the processes to retain availability and keep staff safe. It was acknowledged that it had been harder to bubble the control room which may have been a contributory factor to the sickness absence.

- Response Times – concerns were raised regarding the service not having met some of the targets with regard to response times, particularly to potentially life-threatening incidents. In response it was advised that in some areas of the County it was not feasible to have a station, so the focus in those areas was on prevention work. Those areas were covered by dynamic deployment. Response times of over 25mins was a concern that needed to be addressed.
- Road Safety and Zero Killed and Seriously Injured Target – there was a concern that the standard of road use for both drivers and non-drivers had deteriorated due to the Covid pandemic period. It was recognised that the broader education piece around road safety had not been delivered due to Covid and needed to be addressed. It was acknowledged that zero was ambitious and although it was not always achievable, it was aspiration that was needed. A zero aspiration had been achieved in other areas such as one year of zero fire deaths. There were a wide range of measures in place to work towards the zero aspiration through the Safer Essex Road Plan.

Members raised issues regarding the format and readability of the performance report in its current format and how they would like some of the data to be presented in future reports. It was noted that it was the last time that the performance report would be presented in this format and future reports would take into account the suggestions that had been made.

It was agreed that further detailed information would be provided to the Panel outside of the meeting on the following issues:

1. Impact of 10% increase in non-residential fires with regard to loss of livestock and crops

### **Resolved:**

That the Panel received and noted the report.

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

The Panel received and raised questions on report EPFCP/21/22 which provided information about financial and strategic decisions made by the PFCC.

The Panel sought further clarification on the following decisions:

- Month 12 Revenue Appropriations
- Crime Prevention Show Garden 2022
- Essex SARC Paediatric Cover
- 2022-23 Crime Prevention Fund Outcome

Further information was requested on Essex SARC Paediatric Cover and it agreed that the quarterly reporting would be provided to the Panel after the meeting.

**Resolved:**

That the Panel received and noted the report.

**6 Response to the Government's 'Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service' consultation**

The Panel received report EPFCP/22/22 which provided the Panel with the draft response to the Government's 'Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service' consultation for comment and approval prior to the submission date of 26 July 2022.

Some Panel Members raised concerns with how particular questions within the Consultation document had been worded and the implications.

An amendment to the response was proposed by Councillor McGurran and seconded by Councillor Collins, which sought to clarify that where a question was outside of the Panel's remit a neutral 'neither agree nor disagree' response had been recorded. On being put to the vote the amendment was passed and it was

**Resolved:**

1. That the Panel received and considered the draft consultation response in conjunction with the advice provided in the report.
2. That the Panel amended the response by clarifying that where a question was outside of the Panel's remit a neutral 'neither agree nor disagree' response had been recorded.
3. That the Panel agreed the final response to be submitted prior to the deadline date of 26 July 2022.

**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:

- Community Safety Partnership and Hubs Conference held on 20 June 2022
- 'Exploited into Essex' Conference held on 1 July 2022
- Re-tender for victim support services
- Update on Project Minerva, development of mapping tool with Birmingham Trent University
- Government Public Sector Pay Awards

In response to questions from Panel Members, the Commissioner provided an update on:

- Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act – dealing with illegal encampments, change to Regulations
- Progress with meeting the Police uplift target.

**Resolved:**

That the verbal report was noted.

**8 National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels 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.

An oral update was provided by the Chairman, including some matters that the Executive Committee suggested may be suitable for Panels' future Key Lines of Enquiry.

**Resolved:**

That the verbal report was noted.

**9 Forward Work Plan**

The Panel received report EPFCP/23/22 setting out the planned business of the Panel.

An update from the Commissioner was requested at an appropriate time, on the impact on recruitment with the requirement for new officers to be degree qualified.

**Resolved:**

That the Panel received the report, agreeing the addition of an item requested at the last meeting of the Panel, on an end of plan review and performance report of the overall five year Police and Crime Plan as extended to 2021.

**10 Date of Next Meeting**

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 29 September 2022.

There being no urgent business, the meeting closed at 4:30pm.

Chairman