

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel
Report of the Chairman of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel

To All Member Authorities

In accordance with agreed practice, I am reporting on matters dealt with by the Police, Fire and Crime Panel at its meeting on 10 February 2025.

The main items of business were:

Declarations of interest - No declarations were made at the meeting.

Decisions published by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) - No decisions had been published on the Commissioners website since the last meeting.

Questions to the PFCC from Members of the Public- No questions were submitted to this meeting.

Proposed Fire and Rescue Budget and Precept 2025/26 (inc. MTFS). The Commissioner introduced his report which set out the proposed budget and precept proposals for the Fire and Rescue Authority for 2025/26.

It was explained that the total budget requirement for the service was £51.996m including a council tax funding requirement for 2025/26 of £33.914m and a proposed increase of £5 per annum (£91.77 per Band D property).

The Commissioners s151, Chief Finance Officer gave a short verbal presentation which was considered along with the Fire Revenue Budget Report (including the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Precept).

The Panel also considered the following documents:

- The **Capital Strategy and Capital Programme Report.**
- The **Reserves Strategy**
- The **Treasury Management Strategy.**

The results of the Commissioners consultation were also included in the report.

During the meeting and discussion, the following information was shared in addition to that in the report:

- The Commissioner informed the Panel that National Insurance Contribution increases had proved a significant challenge. 53% of the increase would be funded through government grant, the remaining £275k had to be funded locally.

- Single year settlements were challenging and it was hoped that the recently announced future 2 year settlement for 2026/27 and 2027/28 would improve the ability to plan.
- The settlement included the loss of around £0.9m of grant funding for 2025/26 (Funding Guarantee and Special Services Grant) which had been reallocated to other authorities within the public sector (recovery grants), in addition to the continued reduction of the Airwave grant funding, this resulted in a £1m cut in grant funding.
- The referendum limit had been increased nationally to £5 which had enabled the Commissioner to propose increasing the precept by the full amount.
- Some billing authorities had a collection deficit which had also put pressure on the service.
- Reserves would need to be used in 2025/26 and 2026/27 to balance the position over the MTFS period. The impact on reserves was highlighted in the report, appendix 2.
- Transformation work would continue in order to achieve required savings.
- The Capital Programme was scheduled within Appendix 9 at £5.8m, with £4.1m included for 2026/27 and £3.4m for 2027/28. The prudential indicators were included within the Capital Strategy. It was noted that funding for capital spending had resulted in a growing capital financing requirement. A capital funding bid had been made to the Treasury this year by the Home Office but had not been successful.
- The Transformation programme would continue but may need to change dependent on pressures. In the future this may involve not filling vacant post, but this would be dependent on service need and operational demand at the time.
- The work streams to identify the additional £600k savings needed, were not yet underway. These would be developed by the Transformation Board in the coming weeks. The reduction in grant had only been communicated in December 2024 so a mix of proposals were currently being considered. Risk and impact on service would be taken into account.
- Reductions in salary budgets would be reduced by planning work force changes. The Commissioner informed the Panel that a significant percentage of personnel would be retiring in the next few years and this would enable the service to incorporate this into the workforce planning strategy.
- Reserves would reduce in the forthcoming years but a surplus position was forecast by 2028/29.
- It was felt that 'fire prevention' work would continue to increase in importance with the expected release of the report into the Grenfell fire.

- Crew numbers and the impact on budgets was briefly discussed. Safety and reduction of risk was the priority. Shifts, staff numbers and stations may have to be looked at but the Commissioner explained that this was not necessary at the moment.
- Work force planning and recruitment was a long term plan and had been well received in the HMICFRS report.
- NHS funding through the Falls Prevention initiative and Return to Home scheme was important and the Commissioner was exploring with the ICB different ways to increase the joint working.
- It was noted that information on the 3 manned crews had been sent to members of the Panel before the meeting. Questions could be raised at a future meeting if required.

The Panel adjourned to consider their response to the Commissioners budget and precept proposals. Upon reconvening, the Panel agreed:

The Panel Resolved 1:

- a) The total 2025/26 net revenue budget requirement of £51.996m, including the council tax requirement for 2025/26 of £33.941m before collection fund surplus/deficits, be noted.
- b) That the funding for 2025/26, based upon the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, and includes the estimated business rates information for the nine billing authorities, be noted.
- c) That the proposed budget and precept increase of 5.85% (£5 per annum equivalent to 10p per week, increasing the council tax to £91.77 for a Band D property be supported and the Commissioner be notified accordingly.
- d) Council Tax base increase to 369,558 properties equivalent to an increase of 1% and the Council Tax collection fund delivering a deficit of £87k be noted.
- e) The MTFS summary financials and MTFS assumptions be noted.
- f) The MTFS savings requirement into the mid term, including the use of reserves in 2025/26 of £1.3m and 2026/27 of £0.5m be noted.
- g) That the 3 year capital investment programme be supported along with the Capital Strategy.
- h) The business rates for 2025/26 based on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement be noted. This would be adjusted within the Earmarked Business Rates adjustment reserve (£0.2m) when compared to the actual Non-Domestic Rates Income Returns (NNDR returns) from the nine local billing authorities.
- i) That the outcome of the Staffordshire Commissioner's budget consultation be noted.

- j) The delegation to the S151 Officer for the Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority, to make any necessary adjustments to the budget as a result of late changes to central government funding (including changes due to the final funding settlement being announced) via an appropriation to or from the general fund reserve be noted.
- k) That the proposed fees and charges for 2025/26 be noted.
- l) That the Statement from the S151 Officer for the Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority on the robustness of the Budget and adequacy of the proposed financial reserves be noted.

Resolved 2: The Panel commented that future long term planning was imperative, particularly with the possibility of changing demands and funding.

Fire Safety Plan 2025-2028 Update Report - The report provided the Panel with an update on the delivery of the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service Safety Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan.

The Safety Plan was designed to underpin the Staffordshire Commissioners Fire and Rescue Plan and priorities for the Service had been determined following consultation across Staffordshire. The Commissioner reported that there had been more response from partners and the public this year and the results seemed to show an endorsement of the direction the service was moving in. Consultation was carried out every four years and covered the Commissioners term of office. The service continued to focus on vulnerability and working with partners to identify and support those in need.

The main issues discussed by the Panel were:

- The document listed the recent HMICFRS 2024 gradings and action on targets.
- Professional standards and staff behaviour were discussed. Section 4 of the report detailed work undertaken to improve
- Information on the 3 Crew teams and riding in 4's had been circulated to members of the panel prior to the meeting. Questions could be raised at a future meeting if required.
- Risks around battery storage fire and energy storage plants and the officer availability to cope with demand without affecting emergency response time was discussed. The Commissioner confirmed that training and equipment was continuing to develop to meet changing needs. The number of planning applications was a concern as currently building regulations lay with the local authority and fire were only consulted on site access.

- National fire chiefs have devised protocols with developers so that planning applications are discussed with the service ahead of submission. However, currently this was voluntary and did not always happen. Demand could be significant and could have an impact on staffing levels, particularly if fire were to become a statutory consultee.
- The service had invested in software to protect against cyber attacks. The emergency control centre, which was shared with the West Midlands was also protected as far as possible.
- The Fire Unions manifesto on manning crews and responding to calls was mentioned. The Commissioner informed the Panel that this had been costed locally and research would be shared with the panel.

The Panel noted the report and asked for the Fire Unions manifesto on manning crews and responding to calls and the costed local response be shared with the panel.

Fire Statement of Assurance 2023-24 - The Commissioner introduced the report which briefly outlined what services Fire and Rescue provide and their priorities and progress. Response times and the use of on call crews and 3 member crews were discussed. The report was noted.

Police Misconduct and Complaint Regulations - annual report - The report updated the panel on the Staffordshire Commissioner's statutory function of reviews following the implementation in February 2020, of the police misconduct and complaint reforms. The Staffordshire Commissioner was the Appropriate Authority for reviews (formally known as appeals). The Commissioners office received all reviews unless they were about a senior officer, criminal or misconduct proceedings, or article 2/3 (Human Rights), the review body for these was the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC).

The report outlined the type of complaint and the length of time taken to investigate. Lessons learned from the reviews were fed back to the force for organisational learning.

One key area of complaint was 'keeping people informed' after an issue was raised or incident logged. Investment had been made into technology to help with this. The Commissioners scrutiny panels were looking at this area of work and the Commissioner would report back to the Panel when this was complete.

The Panel asked for information on why complaints had been 'out of time'; what the term 'still live' meant; and the demographics of those who had made the complaints and also any officers complained

about. The Commissioner agreed to send to the panel for information.

The Panel resolved:

- a) The Panel noted the contents of the report.
- b) That information on the following be sent to the Panel when available:
 - i. Results of the Commissioners scrutiny panels investigation into the 'keeping people informed' complaint.
 - ii. Information on the 'out of time complaints'; the term 'still live'; and the demographics of those who had made the complaints, and the officers complained about would be sent to the panel for information.

Re appointment of Panel Co-optee - The Secretary reported that Mr Bowens term of office as an independent co-opted member of the Panel would expire in June 2025. It was reported that the Panel's Procedure Rules provided for the re-appointment of co-optees for a second term of office. Mr Bowen had confirmed his willingness to continue to serve as a Panel member.

The Panel agreed that Mr Bowen be invited to serve as a co-opted member of the Panel for a further four year term commencing June 2025.

Questions to the PFCC by Panel Members - No further questions were asked.

Dates of Future Meetings and Work Programme - The Chair informed the Panel that the reserved date of 17 February meeting was no longer needed and would be cancelled.

Webcast can be found at [Browse meetings - Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel - Staffordshire County Council](#)

For more information on these meetings or on the Police, Fire and Crime Panel in general please contact Mandy Pattinson
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Details of Panel meetings are issued to contact officers in each of the District/Borough Councils in the County and Stoke-on-Trent City Council for posting on their own web sites.

Councillor Gill Heesom (Vice Chair in the Chair)
Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel