

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME PANEL

**REPORT TO THE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

5 OCTOBER 2020

Subject:	Review of the proposed appointment by the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire of a Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service
Recommendations:	a) That the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel recommends the appointment of Mr Darren Dovey as the Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service. b) That the Police & Crime Commissioner notifies the Panel of his decision whether to accept or reject its recommendation in accordance with the Fire & Rescue Authority (Police & Crime Commissioner) (Application of Local Policing Provisions, Inspection, Powers to Trade and Consequential Amendments) Order 2017 part 2 chapter 1 paragraph 9(3).

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The report is intended to set out the results of a confirmation hearing by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's proposed appointment of a Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service, carried out in accordance with the Panel's statutory responsibilities under the Fire & Rescue Authority (Police & Crime Commissioner) (Application of Local Policing Provisions, Inspection, Powers to Trade and Consequential Amendments) Order 2017.

2. Background

2.1 The Policing & Crime Act 2017 makes provision for a Police & Crime Commissioner for an area to be the fire and rescue authority for that area. This position has applied in Northamptonshire from 1st January 2019. The responsibilities of a Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC) created under the 2017 Act include the functions of appointing, suspending or dismissing the chief fire officer.

2.2 The Fire & Rescue Authority (Police & Crime Commissioner) (Application of Local Policing Provisions, Inspection, Powers to Trade and Consequential Amendments) Order 2017 part 2 chapter 1 specifies that a PFCC must notify the relevant Police, Fire & Crime Panel of the proposed appointment of a chief fire officer. In such cases the PFCC must also notify the Police, Fire & Crime Panel of the following information:

- (a) the name of the person whom the PFCC is proposing to appoint (“the candidate”);
 - (b) the criteria used to assess the suitability of the candidate for the appointment;
 - (c) why the candidate satisfies those criteria; and
 - (d) the terms and conditions on which the candidate is to be appointed.
- 2.3 The Police, Fire & Crime Panel must review the proposed appointment at a confirmation hearing. A confirmation hearing is defined as: “A meeting of the Panel, held in public, at which the candidate is requested to appear for the purpose of answering questions relating to the appointment”.
- 2.4 The Police, Fire & Crime Panel must then make a report to the PFCC stating the outcome of the review. In the case of the proposed appointment of a chief fire officer the Panel must make a recommendation as to whether or not the candidate should be appointed. Alternatively, the Panel may resolve to veto the proposed appointment, if at least two-thirds of the people who are members of the Police, Fire & Crime Panel at the time vote in favour of making that decision.
- 2.5 The PFCC may accept or reject the Police, Fire & Crime Panel's recommendation as to whether or not the candidate should be appointed. The PFCC must notify the Panel of their decision on the Panel's recommendation. In the event that the Panel vetoes the PFCC's proposed appointment the PFCC must not appoint that candidate. The PFCC must then propose a reserve candidate, whose appointment will be subject to review at a further confirmation hearing.
- 2.6 The Police, Fire & Crime Panel must publish its report to the PFCC, although it is for the Panel to decide the manner in which the report is published.

3. Review of the Proposed Appointment

- 3.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel met in public on 2nd October 2020 to hold a confirmation hearing for the proposed appointment of Mr Darren Dovey as the Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service.
- 3.2 The Panel was provided with information about the proposed appointment ahead of the confirmation hearing. This included the information referred to in paragraph 2.2 above.
- 3.3 The Panel was further advised of the particular background to the proposed appointment. Mr Dovey had notified the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner of his intention to retire due to the detrimental effect of the current pension scheme for chief fire officers. The Commissioner proposed to re-appoint Mr Dovey on a fixed-term contract of two years in order to avoid Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service being left without a chief fire officer at a time of serious national concern caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commissioner also proposed to abate the Chief Fire Officer's pension, for which there was precedent at other Fire & Rescue authorities. Abatement normally required a break in service of one calendar month. In the current circumstances the Commissioner proposed to make use of provision under the Finance Act 2020 that modified the break in

service requirement in cases when employment began from 1st March to 1st November 2020 and where the main basis for it was to respond to the effects of the pandemic. The Commissioner had been informed by legal advice and discussion with the Home Office. He considered that the proposed approach was sound and was in the best interests of Northamptonshire at the current time.

3.4 At the confirmation hearing the Panel asked questions of Mr Dovey focusing on his professional competence and personal independence, which enabled Panel members to evaluate his suitability for the role. These questions covered the following areas:

- Perceptions of the key challenges facing Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service and how these can be addressed.
- Approaches to improving Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service performance and managing within the current financial environment.
- Experience of service transformation and of developing innovative solutions to meet needs.
- Building and maintaining good relationships with partners.
- Experience of delivering services that are informed by and meet different needs within the community.
- Personal motivation to continue in the role of Chief Fire Officer.
- Approaches to working together with the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner whilst reflecting the distinctions between their respective responsibilities.

3.5 The confirmation hearing was webcast live and the recording is available to view at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOtMXypYYhvEHxYkCiUdtqw>

4. Outcome of the Review

4.1 After questioning Mr Dovey and taking account of the other information provided to the Panel members expressed their confidence in the commitment, vision and capabilities he would bring to the role of Chief Fire Officer. They felt that Mr Dovey's previous leadership of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service showed a track record of driving performance improvement and supporting innovation and a positive working ethos. This would continue to benefit Northamptonshire during the potentially challenging period ahead.

4.2 Members commented that the information provided to the Panel gave reassurance that the process followed by the Commissioner in relation to this appointment seemed to be sufficiently robust and informed by advice. Members also commented during discussion on the importance of the Commissioner carrying out appropriate succession planning before the conclusion of the Chief Fire Officer's fixed term appointment.

4.3 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel resolved unanimously that:

The Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel recommends the appointment of Mr Darren Dovey as the Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service.

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Background Papers:	Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 <i>Police & Crime Panels Guidance on Confirmation Hearings</i> Local Government Association and Centre for Public Scrutiny (August 2012) Policing & Crime Act 2017 Fire & Rescue Authority (Police and Crime Commissioner) (Application of Local Policing Provisions, Inspection, Powers to Trade and Consequential Amendments) Order 2017 <i>Policing and fire governance: guidance for police and crime panels</i> Local Government Association and Centre for Public Scrutiny (July 2019)