

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME PANEL

REPORT TO THE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

8 JULY 2021

Report Title	Review of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's Fire & Rescue Statement for 2020/21
Report Author	James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West Northamptonshire Council James.edmunds@westnorthants.gov.uk

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers		
West MO (for West and joint papers)	Catherine Whitehead	02/07/2021

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The report is intended to set out the results of the review by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's Fire & Rescue Statement for 2020/21.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire is required to publish an annual Fire & Rescue Statement providing assurance of compliance with key strategic plans and requirements. The Fire & Rescue Statement must be reviewed by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel, resulting in the production of a report to the Commissioner.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire:
- Considers this report by the Police, Fire & Crime Panel arising from its review of his Fire & Rescue Statement for 2020/21 carried out in accordance with the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 Schedule A2 Section 5.
 - Provides the Panel with a response to this report and its recommendations set out in section 6 in accordance with the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Section 12 Paragraph 4(a).

- 3.2 Reasons for Recommendation(s) – The recommendations are required to complete the Panel’s review of the Fire & Rescue Statement for 2020/21 published by the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, in accordance with the Panel’s statutory responsibilities.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 With effect from 1st January 2019 the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire took responsibility for the governance of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS), as the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority.
- 4.2 The Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 requires the appropriate Secretary of State to produce a Fire & Rescue National Framework setting out the priorities and objectives for Fire & Rescue authorities in connection with the discharge of their functions. Every Fire & Rescue authority must have regard to the National Framework in carrying out its functions and must publish an annual statement (the Fire & Rescue Statement) outlining how the authority and its Fire & Rescue service have had regard to:
- a) the National Framework
 - b) the Integrated Risk Management Plan agreed by the authority
 - c) the Fire & Rescue Plan, or similar strategic plan, agreed by the authority
- 4.3 The Fire & Rescue Statement must also provide assurance to the community and to the government on financial, governance and operational matters.
- 4.4 These requirements apply to Police & Crime commissioners who take on the functions of a fire and rescue authority under the provisions of the Policing & Crime Act 2017, as is the case in Northamptonshire.
- 4.5 Schedule A2 Section 5 of the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 specifies that when a Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC) produces a Fire & Rescue Statement it must be sent to the relevant Police, Fire & Crime Panel as soon as practicable.
- 4.6 The Police, Fire & Crime Panel must arrange a public meeting of the Panel to be held as soon as practicable after the Panel is sent the Statement.
- 4.7 The PFCC must attend the Police, Fire & Crime Panel meeting to present the Statement and to answer such questions from the Panel about it as Panel members think appropriate.
- 4.8 The Police, Fire & Crime Panel must review the Statement and make a report or recommendations on it to the PFCC. The report or recommendations of the Panel must be published. The PFCC must provide a response to the Panel and must also publish that response.

5. Review of the Fire & Rescue Statement

- 5.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel met in public on 17th June 2021 to review the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's Fire & Rescue Statement for 2020/21.
- 5.2 In presenting the Statement the Commissioner highlighted that the results of previous work to improve the governance of NFRS were now embedded in standard operating arrangements. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) recognised improvements to performance and oversight that had been made in Northamptonshire. This represented tangible progress towards the Commissioner's aim to deliver an effective, sustainable Fire & Rescue service. The Commissioner was proud of what had been done and the progressive approach taken to achieve it.
- 5.3 The Panel then considered the position reported in the Fire & Rescue Statement and questioned the Commissioner on his confidence in the level of assurance it set out, with particular reference to operational assurance.
- 5.4 A Panel member emphasised the benefit of effective community engagement by NFRS and the potential to carry out more activity in schools for this purpose. The Commissioner noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had created challenges for this type of activity, although home fire safety checks had continued to be a means of providing information about fire prevention. The Panel was subsequently advised that the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) was currently working with NFRS to enhance its existing fire prevention offer, which would include working with young people. It was also confirmed that the Northamptonshire Emergency Services Cadets scheme still operated. The OPFCC aimed to develop the scheme but this would involve changing the current delivery model to use officers' professional expertise in a targeted way alongside contributions by general volunteers. Resources were available to support the development of the scheme once the approach was confirmed.
- 5.5 A Panel member questioned whether smaller community-based fire stations would continue to form part of the service provided by NFRS. The Commissioner advised that there were no plans to close any existing fire stations in the near future. This position reflected that work carried out in support of the creation of the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority had included a strategic review of future service delivery by NFRS. Ideally, he would want to consolidate the fire stations in Rothwell and Desborough and to move Kettering fire station from its current location next to a school. However, resources were not currently available to pursue this.
- 5.6 A Panel member noted that they had received training in using a defibrillator at Thrapston fire station and questioned the potential to extend this offer, for example, by delivering training in schools. The Commissioner highlighted that the future role of firefighters was the subject of current discussion at national level, including with the relevant trade unions. Services needed to be affordable within the resources provided by the government. Consideration was being given to matters such as fire appliances carrying defibrillators and trauma packs.

5.7 The Chair noted that as a result of the first part of the Home Office review into the role of Police & Crime commissioners the government proposed to consult on making the PFCC model the standard national approach. This reflected positively on the work done in Northamptonshire and other areas that had already adopted this model. Panel members subsequently endorsed the Fire & Rescue Statement and welcomed that it provided clear information about performance against key community outcome measures.

6. Outcomes of the Review

6.1 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel resolved:

To accept the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's Fire & Rescue Statement for 2020/21.

7. Background Papers

Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004

Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011

Policing & Crime Act 2017

Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel Terms of Reference.