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Minutes of a meeting of the **Cheshire Police and Crime Panel**
held on Thursday, 21st July, 2022 in the The Council Chamber, Wyvern
House, The Drumber, Winsford, CW7 1AH

PRESENT

Councillors:

Cheshire East: Councillors J Paul Findlow, Laura Jeuda and
Denis Murphy

Cheshire West & Chester: Councillors Rob Bissett, Keith Millar and Lynn
Riley

Halton Councillors Martha Lloyd Jones and Norman
Plumpton Walsh

Warrington: Councillor Wendy Maisey OBE

Independent Co-optees: Mrs Sally Hardwick, Mr Evan Morris MBE and
Miss Yasmin Somani

Officers: Mr Martin Smith, Cheshire East Council

17 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Mick Warren (Cheshire East Council)
and Cllr Jane Whalen (Warrington Council).

18 CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATION OF INTERESTS. RELEVANT AUTHORITIES (DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS) REGULATIONS 2012

Councillor Denis Murphy noted that he was a member of the Cheshire Fire
and Rescue Authority.

19 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public wished to speak at the meeting.

20 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24th June 2022 be approved.

21 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

In advance of the discussion on the Home Office White Paper the Chair of the Panel, Mr Evan Morris MBE, made a short statement, the full text of which is attached to these minutes.

22 HOME OFFICE INITIATIVES/CONSULTATION

The Panel discussed the Home Secretary's review into Police and Crime Commissioners, noting her statement to the House of Commons.

A detailed discussion on the White Paper "Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service" took place, with an overall approach being agreed by the Panel. The Secretariat were authorised to compile and submit the response.

RESOLVED:

That the outcome of the Home Secretary's review into Police and Crime Commissioners be noted.

That the Panel make a submission to the Home Office consultation on the future of the Fire and Rescue Service, authorising the Secretariat to compile the detail of the submission, finalise the response, and submit this, as appropriate.

The submission made to the Consultation exercise is attached to these Minutes for reference.

STATEMENT MY MR EVAN MORRIS MBE

I welcome the fact that the Cheshire Police and Crime Panel called for a full and formal meeting to discuss the Government White Paper, "Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service".

Some members of the Panel are aware of my career in Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and my proud association and experience with the Cheshire Fire Authority. Indeed, it was only with the support of members of the Authority that the Service's efforts in Community Safety and prevention, saw Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service being awarded many national awards for innovation and collaboration and subsequently receiving the award for Fire and Rescue Service of the Year. Such was the impact and support of the Cheshire Fire Authority on the operational effectiveness and the service delivery of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

I outline this to set the scene for this meeting. The Cheshire Police and Crime Panel has responded in the past to two consultations where we have highlighted the collaboration between Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and Cheshire Police and the potential for the future. These were the Police Foundation Strategic Review of Policing and the Home Secretary's review of the role of Police and Crime Commissioners. Both have sought to extract opinion on future governance models of Fire and Rescue Services.

What I want us to consider are the implications in this White Paper for Police and Crime Panels. The three governance options put forward effectively do not include Fire Authorities. This being the case it would be irresponsible for us not to scope the potential impact on our Panel, when and if the White Paper is translated into legislation. One of the issues I would suggest the Cheshire Panel needs to reflect in our submission to the White Paper, is our severe concern that where the four existing Police Fire and Crime Commissioner governance models exist, there have been no additional resources from the Home Office to either the Police and Crime Panel or the local authority that supports them.

For us as a Police and Crime Panel this has serious consequences. If the governance models outlined in the White Paper become law, a single elected official will become responsible for the governance of both the Fire and Rescue Service and the Police. In these circumstances he or she would then replace Fire Authorities, and Police and Crime Panels would become Police Fire and Crime Panels.

Finally, and in testament to the Cheshire Fire Authority and the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, I would highlight that the White Paper is critical nationally of the overall Fire and Rescue Services response to the Pandemic, sighting a report by Sir Tom Winsor the Chief Inspector of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services. I would ask the Cheshire Police and Crime Panel to consider and acknowledge in responding to this consultation that during the Pandemic, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service went way beyond its statutory duty in service delivery in responding to the crisis. This was acknowledged in a very detailed and complimentary letter dated 22 January 2021, from Zoe Billingham, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Service

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Evan Morris MBE
Chair, Cheshire Police and Crime Panel
Vice Chair, National Association of Police Fire and Crime Panels



Cheshire Police and Crime Panel

Response to Home Office Consultation

Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service

Question 29

Strongly disagree.

Question 30

The Cheshire Police and Crime Panel is of the view that at the present time there is no evidence, at least in Cheshire, that there is a need for change to the governance arrangements of the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Fire and Rescue Service in Cheshire provides an excellent service to the public and is supported by a very effective and experienced Fire Authority. Making a change at present, or in the near future, would be the wrong time and in all likelihood would focus attention away from many of the challenges facing the Fire and Rescue Service at a time when public finances are stretched. This position is unlikely to change for some time to come.

If responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service were transferred to the Police and Crime Commissioner, there is a concern that the Commissioner would not be able to devote as much attention as would be necessary to the Criminal Justice system and to delivering the aspirations of the Cheshire community for such things as lower crime rates, reduced reoffending and safer communities.

The Cheshire Panel do support closer working between the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service and note that in the county the two services share back-office support and accommodation. Initiatives such as “safe

and well” visits, something pioneered in Cheshire, can benefit both Services and the wider community. Irrespective to any changes to the governance arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services, the Panel would wish to see an increase in collaboration, but does feel that this is possible without radical change to governance arrangements.

The Panel have concerns that should change be made, and in the context of Cheshire, responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service transferred to the Police and Crime Commissioner, there would be a need for greater scrutiny of the Commissioner than could be delivered by the Panel and its lead local authority under the current arrangements.

The Cheshire Panel has only 13 members (10 Councillors and 3 independent co-opted members) and the Home Office grant to the lead authority has not increased for many years. If changes are to be made, very serious consideration needs to be given to the effectiveness of the scrutiny arrangements that are put in place. Police and Crime Panels, when operating effectively, should act as a “critical friend” to the Commissioner. This should not be lost by very significantly widening the remit of Commissioners, without at the same time bolstering the role of, and resources available to, Police and Crime Panels.

Question 31

Disagree.

Question 32

Strongly disagree.

Question 33

No.

Question 40

Strongly agree.

Question 41

The Cheshire Police and Crime Panel is of the view that should responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service transfer away from the current Fire Authority to the Police and Crime Commissioner (which it would not want to see), it is important that the Chief Fire Officer is given a degree of operational independence, in the same way that the Chief Constable has been. It is recognised that this would be a change to the current arrangement, where the Fire Authority can make some decisions in relation to such things as the allocation of resources. However, the Fire Authority is made up of Councillors representing (in the case of Cheshire) the four Borough Councils (all unitary authorities), and between them they have a considerable amount of “collective wisdom” in relation to the needs of the Cheshire community. Such knowledge could not rest with one individual, no matter how well advised and supported they were.

Question 43

Please see response to question 41.

Question 45

Neither agree or disagree.

Question 46

Strongly agree.

Question 47

Strongly disagree.

Question 48

The Cheshire Police and Crime Panel is of the view that a Fire Authority, identical or similar in structure to the current arrangement are best placed to determine the strategic way forward for the Fire and Rescue Service in Cheshire. Such an Authority should always be advised by senior Fire and

Rescue Service officers, but it should be recognised that in the context of the Fire and Rescue Service there can be a grey area between the strategic and operational.

25th July 2022