

**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL**  
**REPORT TO THE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER**  
**FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

**24 OCTOBER 2024**

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| <b>Report Title</b>  | <b>Review of the proposed appointment by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire of a Chief Finance Officer</b>   |
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**1. Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1. The report is intended to set out the results of the review by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire’s proposed appointment of a Chief Finance Officer.

**2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire must appoint a person to be responsible for the proper administration of the Commissioner’s financial affairs, referred to as the Commissioner’s chief finance officer. When the Commissioner proposes to make an appointment to this position the Police, Fire and Crime Panel must hold a confirmation hearing to review the proposed appointment in order to make a recommendation on it. This report sets out the results of a confirmation hearing held by the Panel on 23 October 2024 concerning the proposed appointment of Mr Vaughan Ashcroft as Chief Finance Officer.

**3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel recommends:
- a) That the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire appoints Mr Vaughan Ashcroft as Chief Finance Officer.
  - b) That the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner notifies the Panel of her decision whether to accept or reject its recommendation in accordance with the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 schedule 1 paragraph 12(2).

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

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- 4.1 The recommendations are required to complete the Panel's review of the proposed appointment by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner of a chief finance officer, in accordance with the Panel's statutory responsibilities.

#### **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1 The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 schedule 1 paragraph 6(1)(b) specifies that a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) must appoint a person to be responsible for the proper administration of the PCC's financial affairs, referred to as the PCC's chief finance officer. Schedule 1 of the 2011 Act further specifies that a person appointed as the PCC's chief finance officer must be qualified for appointment by being a member of one or more identified professional bodies for accountancy.
- 5.2 Schedule 1 paragraph 9 of the 2011 Act requires that a PCC must notify the relevant Police and Crime Panel of the proposed appointment of a chief finance officer. In such cases the PCC must also notify the Police and Crime panel of the following information:
- a) the name of the person whom the PCC 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.
- 5.3 The Police and 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."
- 5.4 The Police and Crime Panel must make a report to the PCC on the review. The report must include a recommendation to the PCC as to whether or not the candidate should be appointed.
- 5.5 The PCC may accept or reject the Police and Crime Panel's recommendation as to whether or not the candidate should be appointed. The PCC must notify the Panel of their decision on the Panel's recommendation.
- 5.6 The Police and Crime Panel must publish its report to the PCC, although it is for the Panel to decide the manner in which the report is published.

#### **6. Review of the proposed appointment of a Chief Finance Officer**

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- 6.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel met in public on 23 October 2024 to hold a confirmation hearing for the proposed appointment of Mr Vaughan Ashcroft as Chief Finance Officer.

- 6.2 The Panel was provided with information about the proposed appointment ahead of the confirmation hearing. This included the information referred to in paragraph 5.2 above.
- 6.3 At the confirmation hearing the Panel asked questions of Mr Ashcroft, intended to enable Panel members to evaluate his suitability for the role. In accordance with relevant guidance these questions focussed on the areas of professional competence (: the candidate's ability to carry out the role) and personal independence (: the need for the candidate to act in a manner that is operationally independent of the PCC). The questions covered the following areas:
- Mr Ashcroft's experience of carrying out the role of Chief Finance Officer on an interim basis during 2024 and the learning gained from this.
  - Perceptions of the main current financial challenges for policing and fire and rescue and how Mr Ashcroft would aim to work with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) to address these.
  - Approaches to ensuring that the Office of the PFCC (OPFCC) and the Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority operated effective financial governance arrangements and were informed by good intelligence on new issues, priorities and risks.
  - Experience of leading action to deliver strategic priorities set by a public authority.
  - Approaches to leading and inspiring OPFCC staff members to work towards its strategic priorities and to work in a way that reflected its organisational vision and values.
  - Experience of making a case to partner organisations to gain their support for a significant policy or action, including partners outside of policing and fire and rescue.
  - Approaches to providing potentially unwelcome advice and challenge to a senior leader.
  - The future working relationship between the Panel and the Chief Finance Officer.
  - The outcomes that Mr Ashcroft most wished to achieve in his first year in the role.
- 6.4 The confirmation hearing was webcast live and the recording is available to view at the following link: [Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel- 23 October 2024 - YouTube](#).

## **7. Outcome of the Review**

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- 7.1 After questioning Mr Ashcroft and taking account of the other information provided to the Panel, members endorsed the proposed appointment. Members expressed confidence in Mr Ashcroft's financial expertise and level of professional experience, which included experience of carrying out the OPFCC Chief Finance Officer role on an interim basis. Members felt that Mr Ashcroft's answers to questions at the confirmation hearing reinforced the perception of him as a clear communicator who was receptive to challenge. His stated commitment to a management approach based on inclusion and empowering staff members was also welcomed. During discussion some members referred to the importance of the Chief Finance Officer being able to take a strategic focus that extended beyond just the policing and fire and rescue sectors and to provide robust advice to decision-makers when required. Members subsequently highlighted that Mr Ashcroft's career progression showed the capability to assume new responsibilities and

deal with challenging situations, which should give confidence in his capacity to do so as the Chief Finance Officer. Members also commented that the calm and diplomatic professional manner shown by Mr Ashcroft was a strength in itself, was appropriate to the role of the Chief Finance Officer and could help to support the effective operation of the OPFCC as a whole.

7.2 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel resolved unanimously:

**To recommend that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire appoints Mr Vaughan Ashcroft as Chief Finance Officer.**

## **8. Background Papers**

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Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

*Police and Crime Panels Guidance on Confirmation Hearings* Local Government Association and Centre for Public Scrutiny (August 2012)