

#### NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME PANEL

#### 5 February 2019

# REPORT BY THE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER (PFCC) AND THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

#### PFCC PROPOSED FIRE PRECEPT

# REVENUE BUDGET 2019/20, CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

#### 1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present the 2019/20 Fire Precept Proposal and the additional considerations contained within it.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Police, Fire and Crime Panel is **RECOMMENDED** to endorse:
  - a. The proposal to set the first Fire 2019/20 Precept at a Band D Council Tax of £60.76. This is an increase of £1.76 on the 2018/19 "alternative notional amount" level of £59.00 for 2018/19 used to calculate precept excessiveness levels.
- 2.2 Note the information presented in this report, including:
  - a. The statement of the Chief Finance Officer as required by section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 regarding the robustness of the Budget, the Medium Term Financial Plan and the adequacy of financial reserves.
  - b. The total 2019/20 net budget requirement of £24.618m, including:
    - The intention of the PFCC to set the first Council Tax Precept Requirement for Northamptonshire Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Authority for 2019/20 of £14.910m.
    - ii. The future risks, challenges, uncertainties and opportunities included in the precept proposal, together with the financial and operational mitigations and additional considerations identified.
    - iii. That any changes required, either by Government grant alterations notified through the final settlement, amended council tax base and surplus/deficit

- notifications received from the collecting authorities, may be balanced by efficiency savings or through a transfer to or from Reserves.
- iv. The current MTFP and the anticipated savings required.
- v. The draft Capital Programme
- vi. The reserves strategy and proposed use of reserves.

#### 3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 This report, details the first precept proposal for the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (NCFRA) which was established on the 1 January 2019.
- 3.2 The report is the culmination of several months' work by the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC), supported by Fire colleagues and taking account of public and stakeholder consultation and key government announcements.
- 3.3 Following the announcement of the provisional settlement, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) has considered current and future funding levels, the locally negotiated agreed business case for Fire Governance, the consultation, the Spending Review (SR2015) and the Chancellor's 2018 Autumn Statement.
- 3.4 In line with the national and CIPFA guidance, the 2018/19 position on the funding split was a locally agreed and negotiated position between the PFCC and Northamptonshire County Council. Therefore, the only changes to the funding are local factors such as taxbase, council tax surplus and the local impact of Business Rates.
- 3.5 With NCFRA established and the Fire budget and precept separately identified, there will be a relative reduction in the Northamptonshire County Council precept, budget and MTFP.
- 3.6 The budget for NCFRA is year one of a three year plan to build financial stability for NCFRA. It also does include some immediate initiatives for Fire and Rescue to take forwards. Some key features include:
  - a. 2% pay inflation has been included and estimated for all staff (previously support staff had not received pay inflation for some years).
  - b. First day sickness has been assumed for all staff (previously support staff had not received the first day as paid which had affected staff morale and was inconsistent with operational colleagues).
  - c. Funding has been set aside each year for three years to work towards building sufficient reserve levels and a Reserve Strategy is in place.
  - d. Funding has been set aside in the Fire budget to contribute towards the cost of Governance transition over three years.
  - e. A corporate Governance Framework has been published to support the Chief Fire Officer in ensuring financial decisions are aligned to support essential operational decision making.

- f. The first specific Fire capital programme has been prepared to invest, develop and provide the infrastructure needed to support the delivery of future Fire services.
- g. A draft capital programme has been prepared which will be reviewed and refined during the year.
- 3.7 During 2019/20, the Chief Fire Officer intends to review the findings and recommendations from the first HMICFRS inspection, together with the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) which will shortly be issued for consultation.
- 3.8 As such, it is expected that a plan will be prepared by the Chief Fire Officer by the midpoint in the year which outlines the service's response to the HMICFRS recommendations and looks at operational structure and delivery.
- 3.9 The PFCC has reviewed the adequacy and level of reserves and in line with the business case and taking into account advice received, has concluded that reserves are not sufficient. A three year plan has been prepared which builds reserves to an adequate level. Should opportunities arise for reserves to be added to earlier than planned, these will be taken forward.
- 3.10 In considering the Fire budget and proposed precept for 2018/19, the PFCC considered the core spending power issued for standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) for 2019/10 and was surprised to see Northamptonshire funded second lowest of the 30 FRAs in England, just higher than Shropshire.
- 3.11 In considering the proposed level of precept, the PFCC has conducted, and been informed by, a consultation of 4,513 residents of Northamptonshire. The results of the survey are summarised in this report and will be available on the PFCC website in due course.
- 3.12 The PFCC has set a balanced budget for Fire for 2019/20 where all funding for Fire is allocated to support Fire delivery and which:
  - meets current operational requirements,
  - provides some recognition for hardworking Fire staff,
  - provides commitment and support to enabling services,
  - starts to build reserves,
  - contributes towards some of the transition costs of Fire Governance and
  - starts to provide investment in a capital programme.
- 3.13 Additionally, the first Fire budget and precept seeks to take forward the statutory duty to collaborate for the three emergency services. This means that the services should be actively seeking opportunities to work together to deliver more efficient and effective public services.
- 3.14 Both Fire and Police Budget agreements for 2019/20 will demonstrate the PFCC commitment to collaboration, particularly highlighted greater integration between police and fire and rescue to reinvest in frontline services. It is the PFCC's expectation that, over time, the following areas will be delivered:
  - Shared Enabling Services
  - Shared Estates Strategy

- Shared Prevention Approaches
- Interoperability
- 3.15 However, the Medium Term Financial Plan shows that there are financial challenges. Reserves are lower than required, the impact of the pensions review is significant. 2019/20 is the final year of the current Spending review and discussions are underway on future funding of public services which may have an impact on Fire.
- 3.16 If PFCCs were given continued flexibility to raise the precept every year for Fire and the government completed their funding formula review, then not only could this help balance the budget in the medium term but this could also provide additional resources to invest in Fire and go some way towards meeting the challenges.

#### 4. Public Consultation on the Level of the Precept

- 4.1 The 2019/20 precept proposal will be the first precept proposed by Stephen Mold during his term as Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.
- 4.2 During the period October to December 2018, the PFCC undertook consultation on the level of the precept to gain the views of local residents.
- 4.3 In the survey, Fire received a positive response from the 4,513 residents who took part in the survey as follows:
  - "Of those that stated whether they would be prepared to pay more, 70% in total (2,387) said that they would. 9% (304) said they would be prepared to pay an increase of £1 a year, 35% (1,195) would be prepared to pay an increase of £2 a year, 6% (193) would be prepared to pay an increase of £3 and 20% (695) said that they would be prepared to pay an increase of £6 a year."
- 4.4 Whilst results across local authority boundaries and demographics varied slightly, all groups were overwhelmingly supportive of an increase for Fire.

#### 5. Precept Strategy and 2019/20 Precept Proposal

- 5.1 The 2019/20 Draft Referendum Principles (and Council Tax: Local Referendums Briefing Paper) were issued alongside the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on the 13 December 2018 and these included draft referendum thresholds.
- 5.2 These documents set out the principles for "excessiveness", which, in 2018/19 was a 3% threshold for Fire and Rescue Authorities, has been maintained, requiring council tax increases to be set below that level or for the Preceptor to hold a local referendum.
- 5.3 For Northamptonshire an "Alternative notional amount" of £59.00 has been set in these principles for 2018/19 which equates to a maximum allowable increase of £1.76 on a Band D property for 2019/20. This amount will be deducted from the NCC 2018/20 previous precept level to ensure council tax neutrality from the transfer.

#### 6. The Autumn Budget 2018

6.1 The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was announced by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire MP, in an oral statement to the House of Commons on Thursday 13 December 2018. Full details of the Provisional Settlement can be found on the GOV.UK website. The announcements set out provisional allocations for 2019-20. These were originally announced in December 2015 as part of the multi-year settlement offer, accepted by 97% of local authorities.

- 6.2 The publication of the Draft 2019-20 Local Government Finance Report marks the start of the consultation spanning the Christmas period and ending with the deadline for submissions on 10 January 2018 (as is the deadline for the Police Settlement) shorter than the normal six-week period.
- 6.3 Whilst the settlement made little reference to Fire, the national Technical Team undertook an analysis of the day's main announcements with specific focus on those funding streams of relevance to fire and rescue authorities. It showed that the Provisional LGF Settlement contained no major surprises following the Autumn Budget (for which please refer to the TST 'on-the-day' Budget briefing available on Workplace).

#### 6.4 National Headlines:

• A national increase in the 2019-20 Core Spending Power of 2.8% compared to 2018-19. NFCC members (exc. London) see an increase in Spending Power of 3.2%, with stand-alone fire authorities seeing an average increase of 2.2%.

(Northamptonshire's was based on a negotiated 2019/20 nationally funded position as part of the business case, therefore, no increase applied).

- Maintained council tax referendum principles (3%) for all Fire Authorities, Shire Counties, Single Tier Unitaries, Metropolitan Districts and London Boroughs as announced in the 2018-19 Settlement. Police referendum limit raised from £12 to £24.
- Announcement of £98.5m grant allocations to support increased pension costs of £108.5m. Expected to be paid in full in early 2019-20. (Northamptonshire £1.017m).
- No date has yet been provided for the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) except that it shall be conducted in time for Budget 2019.
- Publication of Business Rates Retention Consultation on Systems Design, as well as a Fair Funding Review Consultation and 2019-20 business rates pilots.

#### 6.5 Pensions Grant

In early September HM Treasury announced changes to the discount rate for unfunded public-sector pensions including fire. This, combined with the earlier announcement at Budget 2016, has resulted in a reduction to the discount rate from 3% to 2.4% and has the effect of increasing the employer contributions (to include ill-health costs) from 17.6% to 30.2% from April 2019. The Government Actuary's Department estimated that the additional cost to fire as a result will be around £108.5m per annum.

HM Treasury indicated that additional funding would be provided to public sector bodies in 2019-20 to mitigate most of this increase, with the sector "paying only the additional costs announced at Budget 2016" (a reduction in the discount rate from 3% to 2.8%). This means that fire will pay £10m of the additional costs in 2019-20, with

the remaining £98.5m being provided via a grant under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. It is estimated that NCFRA will be required to bear pension costs of over £100K locally.

#### 7. 2019/20 Funding Settlement

7.1 A summary of the provisional settlement for Fire compared to the notional position in the business case is shown in the table below:

Funding Source	2019/20 Notional (£m)	2019/20 Provisional Settlement (£m)
S31 Grant	0.146	0.173
S31 Grant (*Locally Calculated)		0.187
RSG	2.580	2.229
Business Rates	2.472	2.545
Business Rate Growth (*Locally Calculated)	0.182	0.410
Top Up	2.734	2.769
	8.114	8.313
Council Tax Surplus	0.366	0.379
Council Tax Precept	14.102	14.910
	22.582	23.602
Pensions Grant(+)	-	1.016
	22.582	24.618
Change in Funding Envelope		2.036

Key:\*Figures highlighted in red are those included within the Approved Business case based on NCC calculations, of which their share is also included within their budget and MTFP. However, these cannot be validated until after the local borough and district statutory returns have been completed at the end of January 2019.

- 7.2 The table above shows the increase in the funding envelope settlement of £2.054m when compared to 2018/19 levels. However, the Business Rate Growth is estimated and will be subject to change.
- 7.3 The core spending power tables (which exclude pension grant and local factors) issued by the Fire Technical Team highlighted that core spending power for FRAs ranges between £21.9m in Shropshire to £97.1m in Greater Manchester. Out of the 30 Authorities nationally, Northamptonshire's was second lowest funding at £22.6m.

<sup>+</sup>The pensions grant is included for 2019/20 to partly offset the additional costs.

#### 8. Council Tax Precept Income

- 8.1 The Council Tax and the level of precept is a fundamental part of the local government finance settlement.
- 8.2 Income generated from the precept depends on both the level of the Band D precept and the tax base the latter being effectively the number of properties who are required to pay council tax. Given a rising population this number is increasing and is re-estimated on a prudent basis each year for budget and financial planning purposes.
- 8.3 For Northamptonshire, the 2018/19 actual and 2019/20 taxbases are as follows:

	2018/19	2019/20	Change	Change
	(number)	(number)	(number)	%
Council Taxbase	239,580.49	245,392.20	5,811.71	2.43%

- 8.4 The 2019/20 estimate in the local government funding settlement was 2.6% (a 4 year average) as compared to the actual rate of 2.43%. Interestingly, the Police Settlement includes a taxbase estimate of 1.41% which shows the different approaches undertaken for the two settlements.
- 8.5 A 1.75% assumption is included in the MTFP moving forwards and reflects the growing population within the county.

#### 9. Council Tax Collection Fund

- 9.1 Each year the billing authorities estimate how much of the total potential Council Tax income liability of taxpayers they will collect. They advise precepting authorities of any projected surplus or deficit on the "Collection Fund" by 31st January.
- 9.2 In 2019/20, the collection fund surplus equates to £0.379m and moving forwards the MTFP assumes a more prudent assumption of £180K per annum in future years. This reflects the significant work undertaken by Borough and District Councils during the year to ensure collection rates are maximised.

#### 10. The Financial Challenge – Future Risks, Challenges and Uncertainties

- 10.1 Risks, Challenges and Uncertainties include:
  - a. The impact of the CSR from 2020/21
  - b. The final RSG settlement
  - c. Local taxbase final information
  - d. Local business rates final information
  - e. The impact of how the pension actuarial costs from 2020/21 will be funded.
- 10.2 The impact of a different assumptions to that estimated in the MTFS are as follows:
  - Every 1.0% in Council tax equates to circa £0.145m
  - Every 1.0% in Pay equates to circa £0.145m in a full year
  - Every 1.0% non pay inflation equates to £0.055m

- 10.3 At this time, due to delays with the national Emergency Services Network (ESN) changes, the impact on Fire capital and revenue budgets are unknown.
- 10.4 Any potential for industrial action requires contingency arrangements which have previously been managed within year but need to be costed, determined and funding set aside to provide options.
- 10.5 Any unexpected and unknown implications from the Fire Governance transfer from NCC and implications on the balance sheet when finalised in February/March 2019.
- 10.6 Any unexpected consequences from the financial system build and financial systems.

#### 11. 2019/20 – Base Budget preparation, approach and scrutiny

- 11.1 Where possible, a zero based approach has been undertaken to the Fire draft budget and the previous MTFP used throughout the business case discussions, updated to reflect known costs for staffing.
- 11.2 The sum of £0.400m has been agreed with the Chief Fire Officer to contribute towards the costs of the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. The costs include specific staff required to deliver the new additional fire governance responsibilities, additional costs such as external audit fees, contribution towards the shared enabling services arrangements and a share to reflect that all PFCC staff will deliver for both Fire and Policing. The Police proposed precept report provides further detail on the costs of the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.
- 11.3 Additional costs have also been built in to the Fire budget to include:
  - LGSS Services £622K
  - Procurement £40K
  - Legal Services £20K
  - Cadets £30K
  - Communications Support £45K
  - Insurances £380K
- 11.4 A prudent approach to Fire Pensions has been undertaken building in the full 30.2% pension contribution. It is anticipated that there may be some underspends arising in this area as the implications are better known.
- 11.5 Whole time Fire establishment is built on 242 posts and has been built up at a zero base level at current structure.
- 11.6 Retained Fire establishment is built on 254 FTE on a zero base at current structure.
- 11.7 Control Room Staff equate to 17 posts, built up on a zero base.
- 11.8 Local staff in the establishment equate to 68, built up on a zero base.
- 11.9 Other budgets are built up (excluding the one off saving made in 2018/19) as per 2018/19 levels and reviewed as appropriate with the Chief Fire Officer. Before they are allocated to budget holders, a further review of devolved budgets will be undertaken and in future years, there will be a full zero based review of these.

- 11.10The budget includes circa £60K per annum transfer to the PFCC over three years towards 50% of the governance transfer set up costs.
- 11.11Of the Fire 2019/20 cash limit of £23.943m, the sum of £3.848m relates to areas potentially included in scope for consideration as part of enabling services.

#### 12. Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

- 12.1 For the first precept and budget, the MTFP has been built up on a three year plan. However, during the year, once the opening balance sheet position has been agreed, the budget is better understood and the plan to build reserves is implemented, it is envisaged that this will move to a 5 year MTFP.
- 12.2 The Fire budget and MTFP based on the base assumption are as follows:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
	(notional)			
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Fire Cash Limit	21.882	23.943	24.314	24.780
Capital Financing Charges	-	0.075	0.359	0.728
OPFCC	-	0.400	0.400	0.400
	21.882	24.418	25.073	25.908
Transfers to Reserves	0.700	0.200	0.200	0.200
Draft Budget	22.582	24.618	25.273	26.108
Funding		24.618	24.580	25.205
Forecast Shortfall			0.693	0.903

- 12.3 The plan highlights that at current levels, whilst 2019/20 is balanced, there are shortfalls in future years. These shortfalls are impacted significantly as a result of funding the capital programme.
- 12.4 With the exception of the staffing changes highlighted in the executive summary, any demand and policy developments agreed by the PFCC and Chief Fire Officer have not been included at this stage, neither have proposals for enabling services and interoperability development. The MTFP will be updated when these are agreed and the shortfall adjusted accordingly.
- 12.5 It is assumed that no additional unfunded priorities are given to the PFCC and Chief Fire Officer.
- 12.6 Key assumptions that have been included in seeking to outline the financial challenge for the medium term are:
  - a. That the council tax base grows at 1.75% per annum (source: professional prudent estimate based on the local position over the last three years).

- b. Precept will increase by 2.99% 2019/20 and is based on a 1.99% increase thereafter.
- c. Government funding continues as previously forecast in the business case.
- d. Pay increases are assumed at 2% for all years (source: Technical team estimates).
- e. No significant impacts on grant funding has been assumed from the Funding Formula Review.
- f. Fire staff pensions have been increased to 17.2% (source: actuarial valuation)
- g. Fire Pensions have increased to 30.2% (source: Treasury actuarial revaluation)
- h. No additional, unfunded responsibilities are given to the PFCC.
- i. Further borrowing beyond the capital programme is not required.

#### 13. Capital Programme

- 13.1 The PFCC and the Chief Fire Officer have prepared the first Fire specific draft capital programme, unique for Fire to invest, develop and provide the infrastructure to support the delivery of future Fire services.
- 13.2 The Chief Fire Officer and CFO reviewed the Initial Capital Programme requirements list for Fire. These will be reviewed and more detailed proposals prepared during 2019/20 to reflect joint estates and capital priorities and opportunities with Policing.
- 13.3 To ensure effective MTFP and capital planning some expenditure has been included in the capital programme and the revenue costs built in to the MTFP. However, it can be seen that these costs are significant and so need to be considered with the operational, PFCC and reserve requirements.
- 13.4 The draft Capital Programme is summarised below:

	Total	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Fleet	10.000	2.000	2.000	2.000	2.000	2.000
Estates	1.270	0.270	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250
ICT	0.720	0.145	0.425	0.050	0.050	0.050
ESN	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Operational Equipment	1.460	0.550	0.550	0.160	0.100	0.100
Total	13.450	2.965	3.225	2.460	2.400	2.400

13.5 Whilst the draft capital programme provides an estimate of expenditure for planning purposes, the Chief Fire Officer is reviewing the requirements and plans and the Chief

Finance Officer has recommended that strategies are provided to support the capital programme for the following:

- Fleet Strategy
- Estates Strategy
- ICT Strategy
- Operational Equipment
- 13.6 This provides an opportunity to ensure that strategic planning in both Fire and Policing are undertaken in a consistent manner which could contribute to better integrated working across the services to realise governance benefits.
- 13.7 Once these strategies have been produced, the Capital Programme and the MTFP will be updated.
- 13.8 The Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy and efficiency plans will be finalised and available on the PFCC website by April 2019.

#### 14. Use of Reserves

- 14.1 In considering the budget, the MTFP and level of precept options, it is important to look closely at the size, level and type of reserves to ensure that they are adequate to cover the purposes for which they are held and to provide some safeguards against the future risks identified within the budget.
  - Whilst ensuring that reserves are adequate, there is also a need to ensure they are not excessive.
- 14.2 There were no reserves transferred from NCC and the business case included a proposal to build a general reserve. However, there is also a need to build earmarked reserves such as Insurance to meet Insurance excess levels and claims and operational reserves such as to meet industrial action, smooth ill health costs, fund transformational development and replace essential (non-capital operational equipment). However, it is recognised that these reserves will need to be balanced with operational requirements and built up over time.
- 14.3 At the end of 18/19, it is estimated that there will be a £500K Fire underspend and approximately £200K will arise from planned savings in January to March 2019 from Insurance and Support Services costs.
- 14.4 Whilst CFO has advised that it will not be enough to meet the accepted minimum general and insurance level reserve requirements (a minimum for that would be anticipated to be £750K), it is, however, a start towards that goal.
- 14.5 The Chief Fire Officer has continued with local spending controls within Fire and should the final underspend be higher than this amount, it would be prudent to transfer this to reserves and minimise the impact on future years.
- 14.6 Whilst the exact figures will form part of the 18/19 final accounts considerations, at this stage, the CFO recommendation is that it would be prudent to seek to exceed the minimum level of £700K reserves identified as at 31/3/19.
- 14.7 Types of reserves and planning assumptions are detailed within the Reserves Strategy which is attached to this report. Headlines of which are as follows:

#### a. General Reserve

A guideline level for a general reserve is 3% of net revenue expenditure £677K as at 31/3/19 (increasing to £739K in 2019/20). An external audit requirement is a minimum of 2% (with other appropriate levels of earmarked reserves to support – which Fire do not currently have). A 2% level would equate to £452K.

#### b. Insurance Reserve

This is an essential reserve earmarked to meet the excess costs of insurance claims. Whilst the exact Insurance will not be known until the end of 18/19, legal insurance advice is that a reserve of £250K should be created and reviewed as part of the closedown arrangements.

#### c. Earmarked Reserves

The following areas are considered for future earmarked reserves once the general and insurance reserves are at an acceptable level.

- Fire do not currently have any industrial action contingency arrangements as previously costs have been met from revenue budgets and it is recommended that, in time an operational reserve is created for this purpose.
- Fire also do not have any reserves to smooth the impact of large operational equipment purchases which would either have to be purchased from revenue or if they do meet the audit capitalisation requirements, from capital. It is recommended that such a reserve is worked towards.
- Fire do not have any transformational or invest to save initiative reserves, this
  means that funding such activities would fall on the revenue budget, which is not
  ideal. In line with the Financial Management Code, all parties have to clearly show
  their investment in collaborative activities so it is recommended that Fire work
  towards a transformation/investment reserve as a minimum.
- At some stage it would be appropriate to work towards an ill health pension reserve to smooth the impact of ill health retirements on the revenue budget.
- 14.8 The reserves strategy details the three year plan to build reserves as follows:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
	£000	£000	£000	£000
General Reserve				
Balance brought forward	-	450	600	700
Transfers In	450	150	100	ı
As at 31 March	450	600	700	700
Insurance Reserve				
Balance brought forward		250	250	250
Transfers In	250	-	-	-
As at 31 March	250	250	250	250
Earmarked Reserves				
Balance brought forward			50	150
Transfers In		50	100	200

As at 31 March		50	150	350
Total	700	900	1,100	1,300

14.9 Even with these plans, at the 31/3/22, total reserves will be extremely low and give little resilience to meet challenges, smooth costs or invest in transformation or other opportunities. The CFO has advised that it would be prudent over time to try and work towards total reserves of nearer 10%.

#### 15. Robustness of the Budget –Statement of the PFCC Chief Finance Officer

15.1 The Local Government Act 2003, Part 2, Section 25, as amended by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, requires the PFCC's Chief Finance Officer to report on the robustness of the estimates used for the budget and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. The PFCC is required to have regard to the report of the Chief Finance Officer and the report must be given to the Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

#### 15.2 The CFO statement is as follows:

"At both meetings with the PFCC and the Senior Fire team on the 26 November 2018 and the 17 January 2019, I attended as the Chief Finance Officer, but also the operational finance lead for Fire to provide assurance that these factors have been considered. At those meetings and since that date, dialogue, scrutiny and challenge has continued where new factors or information have been highlighted and discussed.

Working with colleagues I have developed the budget model and have made the assumptions based on professional estimates, peer knowledge and advice and using where appropriate assumptions included in the business case. Where possible I have aligned these with national Fire and technical colleagues.

In developing the model, Northamptonshire County Council and Local Government Shared Services colleagues have supported me and provided me with information and responses to queries and/or points of clarification and I am grateful for their support and assistance in doing so.

As the process for the NCFRA Governance and the budget is new for 2019/20, I will continue to work with Fire colleagues during 2019/20 to further understand and refine the budget model and process to ensure it supports the strategic and operational priorities for future years. I will also look to develop the newly implemented finance system for Fire so it can support the budget process in future years.

Given the need to ensure and build stability and resilience, minimal operational pressures have been built into the budget model and any growth or changes will need to be accommodated from within the cash limited budget set for the year.

I am assured by the commitment to the collaboration and enabling services work to assist in identifying future savings.

Together with the OPFCC, I have reviewed the establishment of the Fire Service and support the need for the PFCC to receive regular staff resource information moving forwards.

I have reviewed the detailed calculations in arriving at the budget requirement and council tax precept and options and find these to be robust. I also have, sought and

received authorisations from billing authorities in relation to taxbase and council tax surplus/deficits and I am grateful to all partners for their support in doing so.

I have highlighted uncertainty and timing challenges with some of the locally calculated business rates growth in the funding assumptions as these will not be available until February 2019, after the budget discussions have concluded. Whilst the estimates are consistent with the business case, these are subject to local volatility and the PFCC is aware of this uncertainty and potential impact.

The Chief Fire Officer and his team have been fully involved in the budget discussions and whilst there is some minimal flexibility within the revenue budget, there are insufficient general or earmarked reserves available should operational demands require access to these. The PFCC and the Chief Fire Officer and his team recognise this position and are fully committed to building a stable and sustainable position in building the adequate level of reserves as soon as possible. In coming to my conclusion on the robustness of the budget I have also reviewed the Capital Programme and Reserves Strategy.

The sections in this report on "Future Risks, Challenges and Uncertainties" and the "MTFP" highlight significant unknown issues moving forwards in the medium term. The impact of future funding formula and the CSR is unknown as is the potential impact of pensions grant.

Whilst a balanced budget has been managed for 2019/20, after that time, the landscape is less certain and it is reasonable to assume that the operational and financial challenges will continue and these are reflected as best estimates in the MTFP.

I conclude, therefore, that the budget for 2018/19:

- 1. Has been prepared on a robust basis, and
- 2. In 2019/20, the budget is balanced,
- 3. Reserves are inadequate and whilst there is an immediate plan in place to build reserves to an acceptable level within three years, I am concerned that there is little financial resilience within Fire to manage any unforeseen issues or to invest in and optimise opportunities.
- 4. The financial landscape after 2019/20 is less certain and the MTFP identifies a need for further savings and the MTFP will be under regular review as savings plans progress. "

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## **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND HUMAN** The budget and proposed precept provide the resources for the delivery of Fire.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS** 

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

the resources for the delivery of Fire.

Additionally, the survey is comprised of a representative sample of Northamptonshire residents.

Environmental implications are considered as part of Fire delivery.

Risks and mitigations have been highlighted in the report.

#### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The PFCC is required to notify a precept to the billing authorities by the 1<sup>st</sup> March each year. In doing so, he must set a realistic revenue budget, informed by the report of the Chief Finance Officer

#### **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 – 2019/20 Budget and MTFP Appendix 2 – Reserves Strategy

#### **Persons to Contact**

Mrs H King, Chief Finance Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

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#### Agenda Item No: 9 Appendix 1

### Fire 2019/20 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

		Budget	Budget	Budget
		2019/20	2020/21	2020/21
		£'000	£'000	£'000
Employee Costs				
	Staff Costs W/T Firefighters	9,270,032	9,455,432	9,644,541
	P/T Firefighters	1,883,154	1,920,817	1,959,234
	Firefighters Pension (W/T and Retained)	3,324,678	3,391,171	3,458,995
	Local Govt Staff	2,038,719	2,079,494	2,121,083
	Local Govt Pension	251,958	256,997	262,137
	Control Room Staff	447,505	456,455	465,584
	Control Room Pension Overtime	55,572 614,389	56,683 626,677	57,817 639,210
	Allowances	266,489	271,819	277,256
	Injury Allowances post LGR	263,161	268,425	273,793
	III Health Pensions & Allowances	143,467	146,336	149,263
	Other staff costs	10,745	10,960	11,179
	Recruitment Advertising and Relocation	6,302	6,428	6,557
	Staff Health & Welfare	91,505 364,379	93,335 371,667	95,202 379,100
	Staff Training & Development	19,032,056	19,412,697	19,800,951
Premises		10.000	40.250	10.515
	Building Maintenance Fixtures, Fittings & Furnishings	18,882 102,242	19,260 104,287	19,645 106,372
	i incui co, i icuingo ex i utilioningo	121,124	123,546	106,372 126,017
Transport		ĺ	.,.	-,-
	Vehicle Running costs, Fuel, R&M	404,429	412,518	420,768
	Leased Cars & Vehicle Hire	208,080	212,242	216,486
	Public Transport and staff travel allowances	45,918	46,837	47,773
	Insurance - Vehicles	658,428	671,596	685,028
Supplies & Services				
	Equipment & Furniture	384,322	392,008	399,848
	Medical & Cleaning Books & Media	17,340 7,181	17,687 7,324	18,041 7,471
	Clothing, Uniform & Laundry	321,300	327,726	334,281
	Catering & Staff Subsistence	54,273	55,359	56,466
	Printing, Stationery, Purchase Cards, Educ Visits	67,156	68,499	69,869
	Professional Fees, Hired Services and Licence Fees	665,634	678,947	692,526
	Computer Hardware & Software	466,080	475,402	484,910
	Telephone and Home Calls	318,499	324,869	331,366
	Advertising & Publicity Postage & Carriage	3,060 17,493	3,121 17,843	3,184 18,200
	Non Staff Expenses	567,686	579,040	590,621
	Subscriptions	15,606	15,918	16,236
	·	2,905,630	2,963,742	3,023,017
Agency & Contracted Services	Downson to Act on Local Authorities	26.224	26.050	27.207
	Payments to Other Local Authorities Private Contractors	26,324 122,232	26,850 124,676	27,387 127,170
	Recharge Within Service	29,584	30,176	30,779
		178,140	181,703	185,337
Capital Financing & RCCO				
	Revenue Contributions to Capital	75,000	50 547	-
	Repayment of 50% Transition Costs Financing the Capital Programme	50,517	50,517 358,660	50,517 728,320
	rmancing the capital riogramme	125,517	409,177	728,320 <b>778,837</b>
Income			-	
	Grants	- 243,288	- 243,288	- 243,288
	Joint Financing Salary Costs Recovered	- 23,640 - 34,541	- 23,640 - 35,232	<ul><li>23,640</li><li>35,937</li></ul>
	Income and Charges	- 34,541	- 35,232 - 167,353	- 35,937 - 170,700
	Rents and Leases	- 133,171	- 135,835	- 138,551
		- 598,712	- 605,347	- 612,116
		22,422,182	23,157,114	23,987,071
County Support Services				
	Accomodation Back Office	1,140,896 400,000	1,140,896 400,000	1,140,896 400,000
	Insurances	380,000	387,600	395,352
		1,920,896	1,928,496	1,936,248
		24,343,078	25,085,610	25,923,319
Growth /Pressures				
Communications and Cadets Transfer to Reserves		75,000 200,000	75,000 200,000	75,000 200,000
Hold Price Inflation - Manage within Budge	ets	200,000	- 87,689	- 89,443
Gross Expenditure		24,618,078	25,272,921	26,108,876

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## NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COMMISSIONER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY RESERVES STRATEGY

#### 1. Reserves Strategy

- 1.1. Reserves are a key part of medium-term financial planning other components include revenue spending plans, income forecasts, potential liabilities, capital investment plans, borrowing and council tax levels. Decisions on these are interlinked. Consequently some organisations will need to maintain reserves at higher levels than others.
- 1.2 All publicly funded organisations should have a reserves strategy to demonstrate transparency and accountability, to comply with best practice financial management and to justify the levels of reserves held.
- 1.3 The PFCC maintains reserves to provide a measure of protection against risk. Without this protection, any unforeseen expenditure would have to be met either by increases in Council Tax or immediate savings (potentially through reductions in service levels).
- 1.4 The term "reserves" has a variety of technical and every day meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. For the purposes of this Strategy it is taken to mean funds set-aside at the PFCC's discretion for general or specific future purposes.
- 1.5 Reserves are required to protect and enhance the financial viability and in particular:
  - To maintain a degree of in-year financial flexibility;
  - o to enable the PFCC to deal with unforeseen circumstances and incidents;
  - o to set aside monies to fund major developments in future years:
  - to enable the PFCC to invest to transform and achieve improved service effectiveness and efficiency;
  - o to set aside sums for known and potential liabilities;
  - o to provide an operational contingency at service level.
- 1.6 Reserves should not be held to fund ongoing revenue expenditure as this is unsustainable in the long term; however they may be important in smoothing a major financial imbalance (revenue or capital) over a longer timescale. CIPFA guidance LAAP 99 published July 2014 states:

"Balancing the annual budget by drawing on general reserves may be viewed as a legitimate short-term option. However, it is not normally prudent for reserves to be deployed to finance recurrent expenditure. CIPFA has commented that Councils should be particularly wary about using one off reserves to deal with shortfalls in current funding. Where such action is to be taken, this should be made explicit, and an explanation given as to how such expenditure will be funded in the medium to long term"

- 1.7 The Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (NCFRA) was established on the 1 January 2019 with no transfer of reserves agreed as part of the business case.
- 1.8 This strategy is the first reserves strategy for NCFRA and reflects the PFCC's intention to build reserves over the short term to ensure a stable financial position for NCFRA moving forwards.
- 1.9 The strategy assumes that the Medium Term Financial Plan [MTFP] is broadly balanced on a sustainable basis across the five year planning period, recognising that savings may be required to facilitate this. Reserves should reflect the agreed financial strategy and should represent the quantified impact of risks and opportunities over the planning period, weighted for their probability.

#### 2. National Guidance and Compliance with Home Office Guidance

- 2.1 The 2014, CIPFA guidance included the establishment and maintenance of local authority reserves and balances, setting out the key factors that should be taken into account locally in making an assessment of the appropriate level of reserves and balances to be held.
- 2.2 On 31 March 2018, the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service published new guidance on the information that each PFCC must publish in terms of Police Reserves. This guidance has been adopted for the NCFRA to ensure consistency.
- 2.3 One of the key requirements is that the information on each reserve should make clear how much of the funding falls into each of the following three categories:
  - Funding for planned expenditure on projects and programmes over the period of the current medium term financial plan.
  - Funding for specific projects and programmes beyond the current planning period.
  - As a general contingency to meet other expenditure needs held in accordance with sound principles of good financial management.

2.4 This information is summarised across the Home Office headings as at 31/3/19 as follows:

Reserve	Forceast	Planned	Funding for	As a general
	Balance	Expenditure on	specific	contingency or
	as at	projects and	projects and	resource to
	31/3/19	programmes	programmes	meet other
	£m	over next 3	beyond 2021/22	expenditure
		years	£m	needs
		£m		£m
General	0.450			0.450
Earmarked				
Insurance	0.250			0.250
Total Earmarked	0.250			0.250
Total Reserves	0.700			0.700

#### 3. General Reserve

- 3.1 In order to assess the adequacy of the unallocated general reserve when setting the budget the PFCC, on the advice of the chief finance officer, should take account of the strategic, operational and financial risks facing the authority. This assessment of risk should include external risks, as well as internal risks, for example the ability to deliver planned efficiency savings.
- 3.2 Whilst there is no prescribed level of reserves that PFCCs should hold; it is influenced by individual discretion, local circumstances, advice from external auditors, risk management arrangements and risk appetite. CIPFA guidance in LAAP Bulletin 99 (2014) specifically cautions against prescriptive national guidance for a minimum or maximum level of reserves and states:

"The many factors involved when considering appropriate levels of reserves can only be assessed properly at a local level. A considerable degree of professional judgement is required. The chief finance officer may choose to express advice on the level of balances in cash and/or as a percentage of budget (to aid understanding) so long as that advice is tailored to the circumstances of the authority"

3.3 However, the minimum level of reserves may be set for the authority by the Ministers in England and Wales where an authority doesn't act prudently, disregards the advice of its chief finance officer or is heading for financial difficulties. LAAP Bulletin 99 (2014) specifies that minimum level of reserves can be imposed on specific circumstances:

"Minimum level of reserves will only be imposed where an authority is not following best financial practice"

3.4 CIPFA indicate a general reserve level is typically between 2% and 3% of net budget requirement and this is consistent with the results of a survey by the

PACCTS Technical Support Team where the majority of PCC's(and PFCC's) across the country reporting a Strategy of holding minimum general reserves at 3% net revenue expenditure.

- 3.5 In determining the PFCC's position, Annexe A outlines how Northamptonshire currently comply with the 7 key CIPFA principles which can be used to assess the adequacy of reserves.
- 3.6 Given that the PFCC is required to meet the first 1% of any special grant requirement and the NCFRA was established without the transfer of any reserves, it would be prudent to build reserves as considered by the Minister in the Business Case.
- 3.7 The Chief Finance Officer advises that it would be prudent to work towards building general reserves to a guideline level of 3%
- 3.8 At present, there are plans to build the General Reserve during the period of the MTFP, therefore, the forecast level of equates to the following (at 2018/19 budget levels):
  - 31/3/19 £0.450m (reserves established post transfer)
  - 31/3/20 £0.700m (maintenance level established)
  - 31/3/21 £0.700m (maintenance level established)
  - 31/3/22 £0.700m (maintenance level established)
  - 31/3/23 £0.700m (maintenance level established)
- 3.9 Whilst these plans are challenging to build reserves from a zero base, they are essential to ensure a stable financial basis for the authority moving forwards.
- 3.10 These levels will be reviewed on a regular basis and opportunities to increase general reserve levels further, taken.

#### 4. Earmarked Reserves

- 4.1 In addition to the General reserve, the PFCC will need to build a number of reserves which will be earmarked for specific purposes.
- 4.2 The predicted position for each earmarked reserve as at 31/3/19, together with an outline of its specific purpose is attached at Annexe B.
- 4.3 At the 31/3/19, it is estimated that the PFCC will hold £0.250m in Earmarked Reserves which are as follows:
  - **Insurance £0.250m** this reserve needs to be established to hold funds set aside where considered prudent for Civil Claims (Public and Employer liability) in line with professional advice. This advice has identified a reserve requirement on transfer of  $\pm 0.250$ m and will be reviewed regularly.
- 4.4 The forecast balance on the reserves, taking into account a prudent estimate of timings for proposals which are currently being developed is detailed within Annexe C.

#### 5. Provisions

5.1 The CIPFA Statement of Recommended Practice is prescriptive about when provisions are required (and when they are not permitted). Basically, a provision must be established for any material liabilities of uncertain timings or amount, to be settled by the transfer of economic benefits. In accordance with this statutory guidance, Northamptonshire established an 'Insurance Provision' which is reviewed as part of the closedown process for each year.

#### 6. Procedures for management and control

- 6.1 Any drawdown from Reserves is subject to the approval of the PFCC, on advice from the PFCC's Chief Finance Officer (CFO); or under the delegated authority of the OPFCC CFO.
- 6.2 The Local Government Act 2003 requires the s151 officer to report annually on the adequacy of the reserves and this is included within the statement on the robustness of the estimates used for the budget and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.
- 6.3 The Strategy will be reviewed annually by the OPFCC CFO as part of the Budget and Precept process.

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# Northamptonshire Compliance with the 7 Key CIPFA Principles to assess the adequacy of reserves

Budget Assumptions (CIPFA Principles)	2019/20 Situation in Northamptonshire
The treatment of inflation and interest rates	NCFRA makes full and appropriate provision for pay and price increases, informed by benchmarking with peers.
	An informed assessment is made in the Treasury Management Strategy of interest rate movements.
	All income and expenditure in the budget is prepared and published at outturn prices.
Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts	NCFRA will be undertaking a review of its estates strategy as a fundamental part of the capital programme and has made a prudent assumption of future capital receipts.
The treatment of demand led pressures	NCFRA is required to operate and manage within its annual budget allocation.
	All budgets except Firefighters are devolved and managed by trained budget holders.
	On an exceptional basis, once a stable position has been established for reserves, agreement may be sought from the PFCC to utilise carry forwards to meet one off demand led pressures. Additionally, demand led pressures are scrutinised and built into the budget set by the PFCC.
	NCFRA have historically identified savings over the years to manage within a cash limited budget provided by NCC. However, depending on funding availability, the PFCC will support investment in areas that reduce demand or which increase efficiency/capacity to deal with demand.
	General reserves are used as a last resort to manage and fund demand led pressures.
The treatment of Planned Efficiency Savings/Productivity Gains	NCFRA has met all financial savings and challenges required by NCC in previous years.
	Any identified savings and efficiencies from service or governance transfers will be monitored and reviewed regularly by the service.

The financial risks inherent in The financial consequences of partnership collaboration working, outsourcing arrangements or any significant new funding partnerships, collaboration, capital investment will be reported to the PFCC as major outsourcing part of the medium term planning process. Where arrangements or major capital relevant, any additional costs are incorporated into developments. the annual revenue budget and/or capital programme. The budget report highlights the risk that partners will withdraw funding as their own budgets are squeezed, or that the continued viability of private sector commercial partners will be exposed to risk in the face of an economic recession. The availability of reserves, As NCFRA will be building up appropriate reserves government grants and other from a zero base to build a stable range earmarked funds to deal with major reserves and provisions to meet specific expenditure contingencies and the adequacy items. Their use and forecast balances as at 31/3/19 of provisions. are detailed in the attached annexe. NCFRA will maintain an insurance provision, the adequacy of which will be monitored in detail by the legal services insurance advisors, together with our insurance advisors. The intention is to build a general reserve for NCFRA which will provide sufficient scope to cover any major unforeseen circumstances.

The general financial climate to which the Authority is subject

It is anticipated that the financial climate will be

challenging and the medium term financial plan will reflect the "best estimate" of future inflation rates and increases in government grants and contributions.

#### Annexe B

## RESERVES OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COMMISSIONER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY 2018/19 to 2023/24

	Rationale	How and when used	Level	Management and control	Risk	Review
GENERAL RESERVE	To maintain a degree of in- year financial flexibility;  To enable the NCFRA to deal with unforeseen circumstances and incidents;  To set aside sums for known and potential liabilities;  To provide an operational contingency at service level.	To meet exceptional spending needs or overspends which are unable to be otherwise financed at the year end.  To smooth the profile of tax revenue over a medium term financial period  To allow higher spending without raising council tax on a one-off basis	To build reserves tp a general principle of 3% of net budget requirement, with a minimum level of 2.5%  Estimated £0.450m at 31.03.2019	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	May be inadequate for major catastrophe, which could jeopardise financial status and reputation of the Commission.  The PFCC would have recourse to discretionary special grant if costs exceed 1% of budget or CLG Bellwin scheme for natural disasters	Annual
INSURANCE	To cover the potential and contingent liabilities of uninsured risks as assessed annually by our insurers based on claims outstanding.	Balance will increase or reduce annually dependent on the Commission's outstanding claims record.  Established in 2018/19 following advice from legal service advisors.	Will vary according to annual risk assessment Estimated £0.250m at 31.3.2019	PCC, on advice from PCC CFO	If no reserve is held the Commission is potentially open to significant excess and claims payments in year beyond available revenue budgets.  Assessment by insurers needs to be realistic not unduly pessimistic.	Annual
EARMARKED TRANSFORMATION INVESTMENT RESERVE	To build and maintain a reserve sufficient to support invest to save initiatives and provide initial funding to set up transformational activities.	To undertake initiatives and transformation without needing to use the annual operational budget.	Will vary according to activities.  Estimated £0.00m as at 31.03.2019	PCC, on advice from PCC CFO	If no reserve is held, PFCC could find it difficult to invest in transformational activities or savings would have to be made from operational budgets before any initiatives could be undertaken.	Annual

#### Summary of Revenue and Capital Balances 2018/19 to 2023/24

Key: (1) Plans to be considered in 2019/20 and impact of timings estimated

Reserve	Forecast Balance	Forecast Balance	Forecast Balance	Forecast Balance	Forecast Balance	Forecast Balance
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
	31/3/19	31/3/20	31/3/21	31/3/22	31/3/23	31/3/24
General	0.450	0.600	0.700	0.700	0.700	0.700
Insurance	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250
Transformation Investment Reserve	-	0.050	0.150	0.350	0.350	0.350
Total	0.700	0.900	1.100	1.300	1.300	1.300