

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

1 DECEMBER 2023

Report Title	Review of the proposed appointment by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire of an interim Chief Finance Officer.
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1. Purpose of Report

- 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 an interim Chief Finance Officer.

2. Executive Summary

- 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 result of a confirmation hearing held by the Panel on 30 November 2023 concerning the proposed appointment of Mr Vaughan Ashcroft as interim Chief Finance Officer.

3. Recommendations

- 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 interim Chief Finance Officer.
 - b) That the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner notifies the Panel of his decision whether to accept or reject its recommendation in accordance with the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 schedule 1 paragraph 12(2).

- 3.2 Reasons for Recommendation(s) – 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.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 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.”
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 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.

5. Review of the proposed appointment of an interim Chief Finance Officer

- 5.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel met in public on 30 November 2023 to hold a confirmation hearing for the proposed appointment of Mr Vaughan Ashcroft as interim Chief Finance Officer. The proposed appointment arises from the retirement of the current post holder at the end of 2023.
- 5.2 The Panel was provided with information about the proposed appointment ahead of the confirmation hearing. This included the information referred to in paragraph 4.2 above.

- 5.3 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 interest in the opportunity to carry out the role of Chief Finance Officer on an interim basis.
 - Perceptions of the main challenges involved in financial management and planning in policing and fire and rescue and how Mr Ashcroft's would seek to address these challenges.
 - Leadership style and experience of moving into a new role or organisation at a strategic level and quickly building an understanding of it in order to exercise responsibilities well.
 - Approaches to providing constructive challenge to senior leaders and to ensuring that the operation of the Commissioner's Office reflects good practice in relation to financial governance and planning.
 - Approaches to building and maintaining productive relationships with partners.
 - The working relationship between the Panel and the Chief Finance Officer.

6. Outcome of the Review

- 6.1 After questioning Mr Ashcroft and taking account of the other information provided to the Panel, members expressed support for the proposed appointment. Members commented that Mr Ashcroft would be able to bring considerable relevant experience and capability to the role as a result of his previous service as Head of Finance and Chief Finance Officer for Northamptonshire Police. Members also felt that Mr Ashcroft's current role as the Commissioner's Deputy Chief Finance Officer provided a good basis for the proposed appointment and would help to maintain continuity during the interim period.
- 6.2 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 interim Chief Finance Officer.

7. Background Papers

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)