

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

20 AUGUST 2024

Report Title	Review of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire’s Fire and Rescue Statement for 2023/24
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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 Fire and Rescue Statement for 2023/24.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire, as the Fire and Rescue Authority, is required to publish an annual statement of assurance of compliance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. The Fire and Rescue Statement must be reviewed by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel, resulting in the production of a report to the Commissioner. The Panel reviewed the Fire and Rescue Statement for 2023/24 at a public meeting held on 12 July 2024.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire:

- a) Considers this report by the Police, Fire and Crime Panel arising from its review of the Fire and Rescue Statement for 2023/24 carried out in accordance with the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 Section 28(4) and the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 Schedule A2 Section 8.
- b) Provides the Panel with a response to this report and its recommendations set out in section 6 in accordance with the Police Reform and 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 and Rescue Statement for 2023/24 published by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, in accordance with the Panel’s statutory responsibilities.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England sets out government priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities. Every fire and rescue authority must have regard to the National Framework in carrying out its functions. Every authority must publish an annual statement of assurance of compliance with the National Framework, referred to as “the Fire and Rescue Statement.” This requirement applies to Police and Crime commissioners who take on the functions of a fire and rescue authority under the provisions of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, as is the case in Northamptonshire.
- 4.2 The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (sections 12 and 28) as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 Schedule 1 requires that the Fire and Rescue Statement published by a Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner is subject to scrutiny by the relevant Police, Fire and Crime Panel.
- 4.3 The Fire and Rescue Statement must be sent to the relevant Panel as soon as practicable following its publication by the Commissioner.
- 4.4 The Panel must arrange for a public meeting of the Panel to be held as soon as practicable after it receives the Fire and Rescue Statement.
- 4.5 The Commissioner must attend the relevant meeting of the Panel to present the Fire and Rescue Statement and to answer such questions from the Panel about it as the Panel members think appropriate.
- 4.6 The Panel must then review the Fire and Rescue Statement and make a report outlining any recommendations to the Commissioner. The report or recommendations of the Panel must also be published.
- 4.7 The Commissioner must provide a response to the panel and must also publish that response.

5. Review of the Rescue Statement

- 5.1 The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire has produced a Fire and Rescue Statement for 2023/24. In this case the Fire and Rescue Statement relates to the final year in office of the previous Commissioner. The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel met in public on 12 July 2024 to review the Fire and Rescue Statement. The meeting was webcast live and a recording is available to view at: [West Northamptonshire Council - YouTube](#).
- 5.2 In presenting the Fire and Rescue Statement the Commissioner emphasised that Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) was a key local service. It needed to be stabilised and able to deliver effective services to the public and to provide a safe working

environment for staff members. NFRS's fire prevention role was important so it was positive to see examples of good performance in this area. The Emergency Cover Review would help to inform future crewing arrangements for responding to different types of incident. Consideration also needed to be given to how NFRS dealt with challenges that were not part of its statutory role, such as contributing to the response to extreme weather conditions. The Commissioner considered that NFRS was in relatively good health overall, although there were still issues that it needed to address.

- 5.3 The Panel then considered the position reported in the Fire and Rescue Statement and questioned the Commissioner about her confidence in the level of assurance it provided and how she would seek to scrutinise and support action to address areas for improvement.
- 5.4 A Panel member noted that a Freedom of Information request made in September 2023 had produced information that NFRS had fallen below the minimum number of appliances required to maintain operational cover 243 times in the preceding six months. The Commissioner was asked to confirm how she and other relevant parties could work with NFRS to ensure that this situation did not occur again. The Commissioner responded that she had just received a report from the NFRS senior leadership team providing an assurance that in the last six months the minimum number of 14 appliances had not been available only 1.6% of the time. This indicated steady improvement but as Commissioner she would maintain oversight of the position, reflecting its importance.
- 5.5 A Panel member noted that NFRS performance had decreased in 2023/24 against the outcome measure for the number of fires in non-domestic premises and questioned how the Commissioner intended to support the Chief Fire Officer to address this situation. The Commissioner responded that it was important that there was a good understanding of the factors that were driving performance data. She had challenged the Chief Fire Officer on this and was awaiting answers on some aspects. A Panel member subsequently highlighted the increased risks of fire in non-domestic premises resulting from empty buildings or from new buildings that were not required to have sprinklers installed.
- 5.6 A Panel member highlighted in relation to NFRS performance against the outcome measure for fatalities due to primary fires that hoarding and self-neglect by individuals increased the risk of fire. This was an area where there was a link between Fire and Rescue and adult safeguarding. It was questioned whether NFRS carried out wellbeing checks as in other areas. Neglect and self-neglect were growing issues nationally, which could also affect performance against relevant outcome measures. The Commissioner advised that NFRS did carry out welfare checks but responding to hoarding and similar wellbeing issues was a matter that concerned a range of organisations. Any organisations that had contact with vulnerable people could alert NFRS to fire safety issues and it would then intervene.
- 5.7 A Panel member emphasised the importance of educating young people about the impact of hoax fire calls as part of youth intervention activity. The Commissioner emphasised the importance of work with young people and the range of activity that already took place in the county. She wanted to do even more, which was likely to be reflected in the new Police, Fire and Crime Plan. Keeping young people safe and stopping them from taking part in risky behaviours

produced wider benefits as well as to the young people themselves. A Panel member subsequently highlighted the award-winning Emergency Services Cadets scheme in the county and encouraged that this be given more resources and extended further. The Commissioner responded that she was very proud of the Emergency Services Cadets scheme. Further information on it could be brought to the Panel if desired, either on the specific scheme or as part of a wider presentation on work with young people.

- 5.8 A Panel member sought reassurance that the Commissioner was seeking to build an effective working relationship with the Chief Fire Officer, given past comments by the Commissioner about the appointment of a non-firefighter to the position. The Commissioner responded that she saw it as part of her role to have an effective relationship with the Chief Fire Officer. Her previous comments about the appointment had sought to recognise the complexities of succession planning and leadership planning. Recruiting from within would have been her preferred option. However, she had seen that the appointment had been made correctly and the Commissioner's role was therefore to support the Chief Fire Officer to succeed. In response to further questions from Panel members the Commissioner confirmed that the previous Police and Fire and Rescue accountability boards continued to operate. Meetings earlier that week had included a focus on prevention activity and the Commissioner could present further information on this to the Panel if desired. The Commissioner had seen an early draft report from the HMICFRS inspection of NFRS carried out in April-May 2024. The findings were better than predicted. The final report would be published by her Office as soon as it was available, which was likely to be during summer 2024.
- 5.9 A Panel member encouraged that performance information like that included in the Fire and Rescue Statement should be presented as clearly and meaningfully as possible. It would also have been useful to have included some performance information relating to firefighter safety. The Commissioner noted that the Fire and Rescue Statement related to the previous year; if it had been produced for her it would look different. She had already asked the Communications team in her Office to look at how information could be presented to best effect in future, to show a direction of travel, where there was under-performance and where improvements were being made.
- 5.10 Panel members urged that the Panel should have an opportunity to meet with both the Chief Fire Officer and the Chief Constable to understand their priorities and challenges as it had done in the past. Briefing sessions with the chiefs and on other topics, as well as visits to facilities, all helped to inform the Panel to carry out its role. The Panel had not been able to meet with the chiefs for two years and it would therefore be particularly welcome for a scheduled briefing session with them to be included in its work programme for 2024/25. The Commissioner noted in response that the Panel's role was to scrutinise her and she did not propose to ask the chiefs to attend Panel meetings. However, there should be opportunities for Panel members to meet the chiefs on other occasions that the Commissioner hoped would meet the Panel's needs.

6. Outcomes of the Review

6.1 The Panel considered any conclusions or recommendations that it wished to make on the Fire and Rescue Statement. It was resolved that:

Points regarding the Fire and Rescue Statement for 2023/24 raised by Panel members during the course of discussion be set out in the report to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

7. Background Papers

Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

Policing and Crime Act 2017

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Terms of Reference