

## **COUNCIL APPOINTED COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVES - REPORT TO THE COUNCIL – COUNCILLORS BAKER, HUGO AND JACKSON**

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This report updates the Council on the work of the Combined Fire Authority. The Fire Authority is made up of 25 Councillors (19 representatives from Lancashire County Council, three from Blackburn with Darwen Council and three from Blackpool Council).

Since the last report to Council, the Combined Fire Authority has met on two occasions, 18 September and 18 December 2023. The Combined Fire Authority has produced a summary of those meetings and the appointed representatives will update the Council on any issues.

### **REPORT OF THE LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY 18 September 2023**

#### **1. Chair's Welcome and Introduction**

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Matthew Salter who had replaced County Councillor Andrea Kay on the Authority. The Chair advised that CC Kay had been unwell. The Authority wished her a speedy recovery and asked that their wishes be passed on to her.

The Chair advised that the International Search and Rescue (ISAR) Team had won the Bravery Award at the BBC Make a Difference awards, following their deployment to Turkey earlier this year.

The Chair explained that, due to the devastation caused by the earthquake in Morocco, the ISAR Team (plus Search dog) had been deployed to assist with the rescue effort.

#### **2. Member Champion Activity report**

The Authority appointed its Member Champions at its Annual meeting in June and current Member Champions were:

- Community Safety – Councillor Jean Rigby
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Councillor Zamir Khan
- Health and Wellbeing – County Councillor Andrea Kay (up to 30 August 2023)
- Road Safety – County Councillor Ron Woollam

Reports relating to the activity of the Member Champions were provided on a regular basis to the Authority and this report related to activity up to 31 August 2023.

Members commented on the valuable work of the Prince's Trust, in conjunction with LFRS. It was acknowledged that Lancashire had the largest delivery of the Prince's Trust programme in the UK and agreed that a presentation would be brought to a future meeting of the Fire Authority to highlight the achievements of the programme.

County Councillor Ron Woollam advised that he had attended the 'Alive to Drive' demonstration organised by the Lancashire Road Safety Partnership. He urged Members to attend future events as this was a very interesting and important campaign to raise awareness of road safety in Lancashire.

It was noted and endorsed that County Councillor John Singleton would replace County Councillor Andrea Kay as Member Champion for Health and Wellbeing.

### **3. Fire Protection Reports**

The Authority received a report that summarised Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service prosecutions pertaining to fire safety offences under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) 2005. One case was currently within the court system with the trial provisionally set for 16 October 2023. Protection teams continued to investigate and build files in relation to further cases where offences were believed to have been committed, which involved a number of types of premises as outlined in the report. Of those cases one had been served a summons with the first hearing scheduled for 20 September 2023. Two of the other cases had draft summonses drawn and four were currently under review by legal counsel. There was also one further case currently being investigated which might see a joint prosecution with the Health and Safety Executive.

Given the rapidly evolving regulatory change in building fire safety, an update on Fire Protection and Business Support was also provided, detailing how the Service was adapting delivery whilst developing its workforce, to ensure that it kept pace with the changes and improved public and firefighter safety within the built environment.

At the end of July 2023, circa 3,685 Business Fire Safety Checks had been undertaken across Lancashire, with 619 identifying significant fire safety concerns resulting in follow up action by Protection teams. The delivery of this valuable risk reduction work was well established across fire stations and continued to receive system refinements.

From 1 October 2023 the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, would be amended by the introduction of Section 156 of the Building Safety Act 2022 which required all responsible persons to record their fire risk assessment in full (including all findings) along with the fire safety arrangements for premises, in all circumstances. This was a significant

change for responsible persons, as the Fire Safety Order currently only required a written fire risk assessment if the business had five or more employees or required a licence. The new legislation would also introduce several additional duties on the responsible person, regarding information they must record and provide along with increasing the level of fines for some offences.

To better prepare responsible persons for these changes, LFRS continued to undertake engagement activities, which included:

- i) the production of a letter outlining all relevant changes - this was being distributed as part of the protection department's day to day interactions with businesses and premises;
- ii) digital media and digital copies of the letter were being shared via partners; and
- iii) a campaign highlighting the changes was being conducted through LFRS' social media channels and the website.

LFRS would also be supporting Business Safety Week (11 to 17 September) where specific activities, engagement and media would raise awareness and support businesses and responsible persons to prepare for change and keep fire safety a priority.

#### **4. Operational Incidents of Interest**

The Authority received a report that provided information relating to operational incidents of note since the last meeting. As this had been a very busy operational period, the report detailed only the larger deployments or more complex incidents. Full details of the following incidents were provided in the report:

- Building fire in Fleetwood
- Storage yard in Accrington
- Multiple houses on fire in Accrington
- Derelict chapel in Rossendale
- Explosives discovered during police operation in Leyland
- Commercial building fire in Haslingden
- Road traffic collision on the M6, closing the motorway in both directions due to a spillage
- Commercial building fire in Burnley
- Commercial building fire in Barnoldswick
- Commercial building fire in Blackburn

## **5. Re-appointment of Clerk to the Authority**

The Authority approved the re-appointment of Mr Mark Nolan as Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority for a period of twelve months, to the September meeting of the Authority in 2024.

### **REPORT OF THE LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY**

**18 December 2023**

#### **1. Chairman's Welcome and Introduction**

Members received an update on the following:

##### Major Fire Incident in Lancaster

On Sunday 3 December 2023 ten fire engines from Lancashire and Cumbria were called to a derelict commercial building fire at the former SupaSkips site on Port Royal Avenue, Lancaster. The fire was deep-seated in 13,000 tonnes of compacted waste and the Service had been on site every day working with national and local partners. Lancaster City Council had provided funding to clear the site which was now expected to be before Christmas.

##### Gas Explosion in Blackburn

The Service had attended a gas explosion on London Road, Blackburn the previous evening. The drone and Service dog were used to assist in the rescue of a casualty from the collapsed building.

##### Demonstration of Hagglund Vehicle

The Chair invited Members to a demonstration of the Hagglund Vehicle on the rise of the meeting. He advised that the all-terrain Hagglund vehicle made it easier to access rural areas during extreme weather events. The Hagglund had now been converted for flood response and would be better able to support the communities in Lancashire.

##### Staff News

Members noted that the Service had recently celebrated the dedication and talent of over fifty staff who were honoured with long service, good conduct awards, commendations, Star Awards and for academic accomplishments. The Authority congratulated winners and those shortlisted in the Asian Fire Service Association and the Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards.

The Clerk to the Authority and Monitoring Officer advised that this would be the last meeting for the Principal Member Services Officer who would be leaving the Service early in the New Year. The Chairman and Leader of the opposition thanked Mrs Brooks for her

dedication and reliability over the many years she had been in the role.

#### Presentation by Fire Cadets, Isaac Kelly and Kit Nicholls

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer was pleased to introduce Fire Cadets Isaac Kelly and Kit Nicholls who had attended the meeting to present to Members their experiences and inform of the benefits of the Fire Cadets programme from their personal perspective and for the Service. Members applauded the presentations given and on behalf of the Authority the Chair wished Isaac and Kit every success in their future careers.

## **2. North West Fire Control – Continuing the Collaboration**

The report set out the background to North West Fire Control centre (NWFC) which was created after the collapse of a national project. NWFC served the areas of Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester and Lancashire. From May 2014 staff started answering Lancashire's 999 calls, mobilising resources to incidents and assisting operational staff with the management of incidents.

NW Fire Control Limited (the Company) as the legal entity that provided the services to the partner fire and rescue services was jointly owned by the fire and rescue authorities and liability was limited by guarantee. NWFC had been a difficult and costly exercise to create with parties to the collaboration advised that it should be seen as a long-term and 'almost permanent' arrangement, due to the complexity and cost of ending it.

The Authority was committed to continuing the NWFC collaboration and agreed increased costs associated with:

- i) shared costs (based on an apportionment model) which increased Lancashire's proportion from 25.5% to 28.05%;
- ii) the replacement of a new mobilising system; and
- iii) additional resourcing costs to deliver aspects of the business plan that supported increased expectations on the sector as a result of recommendations from the Manchester Arena Inquiry and a new Fire Standard for fire control rooms.

## **3. Updated Whistleblowing Policy**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services had published a report on values and culture in Fire and Rescue Services in March 2023. The report recommended that Chief Fire Officers should make sure that their Service provided a confidential way for staff to raise concerns via their Whistleblowing processes by 1 October 2023. This recommendation was supplemented by the National Fire Chief Council's recommendations on values and culture. In response, the Service had established Safecall, with effect from August 2023.

#### **4. Fire Protection Reports**

Members received a report that summarised Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service prosecutions pertaining to fire safety offences under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) 2005. There were currently three cases in the judicial system for offences with one set for trial in July 2024, one set for sentencing at Preston Crown Court in December 2023 and one plea hearing had recently been adjourned until January 2024.

Given the rapidly evolving regulatory change in building fire safety, an update on Fire Protection and Business Support was also provided, detailing how the Service was adapting delivery whilst developing its workforce, to ensure that it kept pace with the changes and improved public and firefighter safety within the built environment.

Members noted that since April 2023 there had been 1,977 business fire safety checks delivered, of which 1,702 (86%) had resulted in a satisfactory outcome, with 275 being deemed unsatisfactory resulting in follow up business safety advice. The protection department followed up activities which had resulted in three legal notices being issued, including the prohibition of two premises and around 100 informal letters issued to indicate fire safety improvements.

The new Building Safety Act came into force on 1 October 2023, requiring Responsible Persons of High-Rise buildings to register their building with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR). To date LFRS had been notified that only 30% of the county's relevant buildings had been registered. LFRS operated as part of the Northwest Region to support the Building Safety Regulator (the Health and Safety Executive) and had implemented a dedicated role within its Protection team.

Members also noted arson risk reduction included five cases of which three incidents involved youths, one defendant following a guilty plea to 'arson being reckless as to whether life is endangered' was sentenced to serve two years and ten months in prison and one defendant who also pleaded guilty received five years imprisonment.

#### **5. Operational Incidents of Interest**

The Authority received a report that provided information relating to operational incidents of note since the last meeting. As this had been a very busy operational period, the report detailed only the larger deployments or more complex incidents. Full details of the following incidents were provided in the report:

- Six fire engines attend a commercial building fire in Bamber Bridge;
- Three fire engines attend a car on fire with persons trapped;
- Ten fire engines attend a commercial building fire in Blackburn;
- Four fire engines attend disused waste storage building in Lancaster;
- Fire crews attend a fatal boat fire in Nateby;
- Six fire engines attend a commercial building fire in Blackburn;
- Four fire engines attend a fatal incident on the river Lune;
- Fire crews attend a fatal house fire near Ribchester;
- Ten fire engines attend a commercial building fire in Longridge;
- LFRS attend a suspected explosive device in Burnley.