



Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee 11th July 2019

Report of: Policy & Improvement Officer

Subject: Petition: Opposing Fire Service Cuts

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Full Council 12th June 2019 debated a petition *Opposing Fire Service Cuts*. Following debate one action of Full Council was to refer the matters raised by the petition to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee for consideration, this item on the agenda. Attached to this report are the relevant item and minutes from Full Council. The Committee have been asked to consider the matters raised by the petition. In addition to the minutes, the webcast of Full Council provides an opportunity to hear the petition, associated public questions and the full council debate it can be found on the link below:

https://sheffield.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/427463/start_time/445000

Consideration of the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Draft Integrated Risk Management Plan is another item on this agenda, and will provide background and context to the matters in the petition. The lead petitioner will be attending to present the petition and clarify any points, questions the Committee may have.

Type of item:

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Full Council request for scrutiny	X
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Petition to Scrutiny	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

- Consider the matters raised by the petition and make recommendations as required
- Category of Report:** OPEN

EXTRACT FROM FULL COUNCIL AGENDA AND DRAFT MINUTES 12TH JUNE 2019

<http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=154&Mid=7009&Ver=4>

Public Questions and Petitions and Other Communications

(a) To receive any questions or petitions from the public, or communications submitted by the Lord Mayor or the Chief Executive and to pass such resolutions thereon as the Council Procedure Rules permit and as may be deemed expedient.

(b) Petition Requiring Debate

The Council's Petitions Scheme requires that any petition containing over 5,000 signatures be the subject of debate at the Council meeting. A qualifying petition has been received as follows:-

Petition Opposing Fire Service Cuts

To debate a joint paper and electronic petition containing over 5,000 signatures, requesting the Council to oppose the proposed plans for South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to cut the number of firefighters crewing a fire appliance from 5 to 4. The paper petition contains 6,321 signatures and the online petition includes the following wording:-

We the undersigned petition the Council to oppose the proposed plans for South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to cut the number of firefighters crewing a fire appliance from 5 to 4. We call on Sheffield City Council and its representatives on SYFRA to: 1. Reject the proposed plan to cut fire engine crews. 2. Reject the plans to remove a night time engine from Sheffield and Doncaster fire stations. 3. Support the FBU's campaign for fairer funding for South Yorkshire fire service.

Minutes:

4.2.2

Public Questions Concerning the Fire Service

Mark Wild asked whether the impact of losing 84 firefighters had been subject to an impact assessment. It was thought that the loss would have a negative effect on response times which would delay the weight of attack to successfully deal with incidents in the early stages of development and critical stages of a rescue. He asked if the Council was happy to back response plans which would see firefighters and the public put at greater risk as a result of cutting front line firefighters.

Matt Nicholls referred to the level of Fire and Rescue Authority budget reserves of £24M and asked whether the level of reserves was seen as a barrier to obtaining more funding and might the reserves be used differently to ensure the public did not lose 84 front line fire fighters, and if so, what funding options were available to the Fire Authority.

Graham Wilkinson stated that new fire stations had been built in Birley Moor, Maltby and Parkway and there were plans to build a station in Barnsley, using reserves. He asked why the cost of the station was £4M, to be funded from reserves, when a station had been built in Humberside, at Brough, for £2M, including purchase of the land. He said that South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue had a history of poor builds and overspends on buildings and appliances. He asked what the Council could do to ensure how the funding, build and design of fire stations provided better value to the taxpayer.

Patrick Renshaw asked how many times the Fire Authority had lobbied the government since the pensions deficit became apparent and what response had been given, if any.

(Note: A response to the questions concerning the Fire and Rescue Service was made by the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety as part of the response to the debated petition on the subject of the Fire and Rescue Service).

4.3 Petition Debate

4.3.1 Petition Requesting the Council to Oppose Plans for the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to Cut the Number of Firefighters Crewing a Fire Appliance from Five to Four

4.3.2 The Council received a joint electronic and paper petition containing 10,429 signatures, requesting the Council to oppose plans for the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to cut the number of firefighters crewing a fire appliance from five to four.

4.3.3 The Council's Petitions Scheme required any petition containing over 5,000 signatures to be the subject of debate at the Council meeting. The wording of the qualifying petition was as follows:-

We the undersigned petition the Council to oppose the proposed plans for South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to cut the number of firefighters crewing a fire appliance from 5 to 4. We call on Sheffield City Council and its representatives on SYFRA to: 1. Reject the proposed plan to cut fire engine crews. 2. Reject the plans to remove a night time engine from Sheffield and Doncaster fire stations. 3. Support the FBU's campaign for fairer funding for South Yorkshire fire service.

4.3.4 Representations on behalf of the petitioners were made by Neil Carbutt. He stated that the number of signatures collected in a short length of time made clear the strength of public feeling on this issue. He said that it was clear the government was responsible for the financial cuts. The proposals to remove up to 84 firefighter posts would mean a loss of one firefighter on each fire engine across the four shifts. He said that the proposals were devastating. There was also a draft proposal to consider the removal of night time cover from the second night time fire engine at Sheffield and Doncaster. There were currently 594 firefighters in South Yorkshire. There was a £3.8M of potential funding shortfall. South Yorkshire had a lack of funding because of the relative density and a lack of coastline and was disproportionately affected in terms of funding.

He explained that whilst there was a funding shortfall, there were also risks to consider. The Fire Authority had general and earmarked reserves of nearly £25M and an operating budget of approximately £50M. The level of reserves was considered to be a barrier to fairer funding for South Yorkshire and a review of the reserves strategy was needed. The petitioners asked for time to lobby the government and stop the cuts. Borrowing might be considered over the long term together with a review of expenditure and efficiencies whilst protecting front end services to communities.

4.3.5 In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13.1(b), the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety responded to the petition, following which the Shadow Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety spoke on the matter.

4.3.6 Councillor Paul Wood, the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety, thanked the petitioners for presenting the petition at the Council meeting. He paid tribute to firefighters who put themselves at risk for others and said that it was important to make sure the dangers and risks to them were limited as far as possible. He said that such dangers should not be increased by actions such as a reduction to staffing or in the monitoring of equipment used by firefighters. Politicians had a duty to protect the public and those working in emergency response services.

4.3.7 Councillor Wood said that, whilst the City Council was not the authority which would make a decision on this matter, it could send a clear message about its wishes, particularly with regard to not increasing the risks posed to firefighters. He said that Members of Parliament in South Yorkshire had also lobbied the government on this matter and there was unanimous support amongst those MPs against the proposals. Cuts to the front line would reduce the number of firefighters in South Yorkshire to 504, which was a considerably reduced number as compared to previous years.

4.3.8 He said that he believed the consultation had been unsatisfactory and he had requested Council officers to look at what communications had been received by the Council on this matter. The Council's Housing and Neighbourhoods Service had expressed serious concerns about the proposed changes. The Director of

Housing and Neighbourhoods, with responsibility for residential regulation, had also been instructed to carry out an impact assessment which could be reported to the Council.

- 4.3.9 Reserves were available to the Fire Authority to enable it to deal with the next 12 months and in order for the Fire Authority to negotiate with the management and the Fire Brigade Union, so that a way forward might be found.
- 4.3.10 Councillor Wood then addressed the public questions which had been asked on this issue. Firstly, he said that he had not had sight of an impact assessment on this issue and the Housing service in the Council had not had communication with regard to such an assessment.
- 4.3.11 With regard to the financial reserves held by the Fire Authority, the government had remarked upon it as a significant proportion of the operating budget and it was a problem. One of the options which might be considered was to consider the use of reserves in the short term. He referred to concern at the amount of money which the Fire Authority may have wasted and he referred to £4M spent on fire engines which were unusable; a £3M overspend on the two Sheffield fire stations; and to land sold at far less than the original values predicted. These were serious issues which it was hoped that the new Fire Authority would take on board and review. He said that he supported the petitioners and the Council would do all that it could.
- 4.3.12 The Shadow Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety then spoke on the matter, following which Members of the City Council debated the matters raised by the petition, as summarised below:-

There was a need for politicians to respond to the issues raised and dangers faced by firefighters were acknowledged. The proposals as a whole required further scrutiny before the Fire Authority made a decision. It was also difficult to understand why the use of reserves had not been included in the proposals presented. It was also questioned as to whether there had been a review of senior management structure in recent years. As this was a government imposed problem, it was also therefore necessary to lobby the government. Scrutiny of this matter was also important at a Council and City Region level.

Cuts to front line Fire and Rescue Services were not supported and reference was made to the tragic events at Grenfell and to what could happen if a similar event occurred in Sheffield. The proposals would mean that a crew member would be missing on each fire engine and it was clear that the Fire Authority reserves needed to be addressed and people should be encouraged to contribute to the consultation.

The Fire and Rescue Service did excellent work, including prevention work with communities and with vulnerable young people. Austerity had affected fire and rescue services in England, with one in five or 9,000 firefighter jobs having been cut. This had served to downgrade the service and the level of risk to communities that these further cuts presented was not acceptable.

Reference was made to a previous ruling by the High Court against the South Yorkshire Fire Authority and to high costs and issues relating to pensions which would be addressed in the next comprehensive spending review. There was still a significant level of reserves, even if those earmarked were discounted. There were various issues which might be raised in responding to the consultation, including in relation to the resilience of four person fire crews; the response which might be expected following the arrival of a first fire engine; review of senior and middle management; and looking at in-house for savings, rather than savings to front line

services.

Whilst Firefighters were kept safe, they would keep the public safe and keeping people safe from harm was a top priority. There were 235,000 houses in the City, which needed to be kept safe and secure and it was important that firefighters were able to respond as quickly as possible in order to do so.

Once it was completed, the consultation on this matter would be considered by the Fire Authority. The views presented by the petitioners and in the debate had been heard and could be taken into consideration by the Fire Authority. This included looking at the level of reserves and the possibility of the use of reserves over time. Matters had been brought to a head partly due to the government revisions to the pension and national insurance contributions.

- 4.3.13 The lead petitioner, Neil Carbutt, exercised a right of reply and stated that he had listened to the views expressed by Members of the Council, and he hoped that the views of the petitioners and residents had been heard. He thanked the Council for its warm words on this matter.
- 4.3.14 Councillor Paul Wood, the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety, responded to issues raised during the debate. Firstly, he thanked Members for their contributions to the debate. He stated that this was a most important issue and one which the Council took very seriously and he said the Council would give its support in arguing against the proposals. He then proposed a course of action as detailed below. In proposing to refer the matter to a Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, the Chair of the Committee would also be asked to consider the inclusion of issues relating to an impact assessment and concerns raised by the Council's Housing Service.
- 4.3.15 The outcome of the debate on the petition was as follows:-

Proposal 1

It was moved by Councillor Paul Wood and seconded by Councillor Peter Rippon, that:

This Council notes the petition now submitted opposing Fire Service cuts and refers the matters raised by the petition to the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, for consideration by the Committee.

Proposal 2

It was moved by Councillor Andrew Sangar and seconded by Councillor David Baker, that:

This Council notes the petition now submitted opposing Fire Service cuts and refers the matters raised by the petition to the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny

and Policy Development Committee, for consideration by the Committee and in addition requests that the matter also be considered by Sheffield City Region scrutiny.

On being put to the vote, proposal 2 was not carried.

Proposal 3

It was moved by Councillor Douglas Johnson and seconded by Councillor Shaffaq Mohammed, that Proposal 1 is amended by the addition of the following words after the words "for consideration by the Committee", as follows:

"and requests that the Leader of the Council writes to the Mayor of Sheffield City Region and to the Leaders of Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham Councils, notifying them of the consideration of the petition by this Council and requesting that the issues raised by the petition are considered by other scrutiny bodies in the region, as appropriate."

On being put to the vote, the proposals 1 and 3 were both carried, as follows:

RESOLVED: That this Council:-

- (a) notes the petition now submitted opposing Fire Service cuts;
- (b) refers the matters raised by the petition to the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, for consideration by the Committee; and
- (c) requests the Leader of the Council to write to the Mayor of Sheffield City Region and to the Leaders of Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham Councils, notifying them of the consideration of the petition by this Council and requesting that the issues raised by the petition are considered by other scrutiny bodies in the region, as appropriate.

(NOTE: 1. Councillors Sioned-Mair Richards abstained from voting on the motion, and asked for this to be recorded; and
2. Councillor Sophie Wilson, having declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the petition, did not speak or vote on the item.)