

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Report of a meeting of the East Sussex Fire Authority held at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters at 10.00 hours on Thursday 3 February 2011.

Present: Councillors Carden, Fawthrop, Freebody, Harmer-Strange, Healy, Heaps, Howson, Kemble (Chairman), Kenward, Livings, Marsh, Ost, Pidgeon, Scott, Sparks, Thomas and Waite.

1. Fire Authority Service planning processes for 2011/12 and beyond

1.1 The Fire Authority has considered joint reports of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive and the Treasurer concerning the draft Fire Authority Service Planning and Revenue Budget processes for 2011/12 and beyond.

1.2 The Deputy Treasurer reported that both he and the Treasurer had been satisfied that the estimates used for the purposes of calculating the Budget had been produced in a robust and transparent way and the proposed financial reserves were prudent, necessary and in line with Fire Authority policy.

1.3 Members recalled that the 2011/12 Committed Budget of £39.328m and related detailed provisions, fees and charges, etc and the 2011/12 to 2015/16 Capital Programme had been previously approved and that prior consideration had been given to Service Investment Proposals.

1.4 Members noted final figures for the formula grant would enable a Revenue Budget to be set at £39.203m. Council Tax Band D could be kept to £81.86, the same level as for 2010/11 on the basis that the Authority would receive an additional grant equivalent to a 2.5% increase in Council Tax from central government. Final figures for the Council Tax Base and Collection Fund Surplus enabled further flexibility of £210,000 in 2011/12, of which £77,000 was one-off, which would be used to fund transitional costs in line with the existing service investment proposals.

1.5 The Deputy Treasurer noted that whilst the reductions in grant funding for 2011/12 and 2012/13 were lower than had been anticipated at 5%, the Authority should still plan for reductions of a further 20% in the last two years of the CSR period. Current modelling assumptions would require additional savings close to £2.5m over the period 2012/13 – 2014/15.

1.6 The Fire Authority has approved the necessary detailed budget and service planning decisions including:

- (i) approving its budget requirement for 2011/12 as £39.203m; a reduction of 0.28% on the 2010/11 base budget of £39.314m;
- (ii) approving a council tax precept (Band D property) for the year 2011/12 of £81.86 (based on final tax base figures), a nil increase on the 2010/11 figure of £81.86; and
- (iii) agreeing that Brighton & Hove City Council and the borough and district councils (the billing authorities) be advised by the Treasurer of the relevant amounts payable and the council tax in the other bands

2. Localism bill

2.1 Members noted an update on the Localism Bill and the principal provisions affecting Fire & Rescue Authorities. The legislation aimed to deliver more freedom and flexibility to local authorities and the power would be given to stand alone Fire Authorities to do anything it considered:

- (i) appropriate for the fulfilling of its statutory responsibilities;
- (ii) appropriate for purposes incidental to its statutory responsibilities; as well as
- (iii) to be indirectly connected with (a) or (b).

The Bill also set out what Authorities could not do.

3. Members allowances – annual review

3.1 The Fire Authority has reviewed the Members' Allowance Scheme and has agreed a nil increase for 2011/12.

Ted Kemble
Chairman

7 February 2010

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Report of a meeting of the East Sussex Fire Authority held at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters at 10.30 hours on Thursday 17 March 2011.

Present: Councillors Belsey, Bennett, Carden, Freebody, Harmer-Strange, Healy, Heaps, Howson, Kemble (Chairman), Kenward, Livings, Marsh, Ost, Pidgeon, Pragnell, Rufus and Sparks.

1. Audit Commission Draft Audit Plan – 2010/11

1.1 The Fire Authority has approved the Audit Commission's recently published Draft Audit Plan 2010/11 relating to East Sussex Fire Authority introduced by Lizzie Peers, the Audit Commission Engagement Lead.

2. Draft medium term plan 2011/12 to 2015/16

2.1 The Fire Authority has considered a draft Medium Term Plan from 2011/12 up to 2015/16. Members noted that the draft Plan had been designed to help with wider consultation and public engagement. Members also noted that it contained a number of Integrated Risk Management Planning proposals that would need to be considered by the Way Forward Working Group and approved by the Policy & Resources Panel before it could be finalised and published.

3. Joint Fire Control Centre

3.1 The Fire Authority has considered a report on the future arrangements for the Control Room functions for ESFRS. They were reminded that the Fire Authority has a statutory duty under the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 Section 7(2)(c) to make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and summoning personnel and that, currently, this function is provided from the Mobilising & Communications Centre (M&CC), based at ESFRS Headquarters, Eastbourne. Similar arrangements exist at West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, with their Command & Mobilising Centre located at their Headquarters in Chichester.

3.2 Following cancellation of the national project for replacing fire and rescue service control rooms with regional control centres, the Department for Communities & Local Government is currently undertaking formal consultation with the fire and rescue service community on the future for control services in England. As a result of the delays in this project, Members were informed that ESFRS had maintained its mobilising system/equipment as necessary, but had held off a full replacement of its mobilising system. Similarly, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service had made some upgrades to its mobilising and command system.

3.3 Members agreed that a joint feasibility study between East Sussex and West Sussex Fire & Rescue Services should be undertaken to explore suitable options for future consideration regarding the future delivery of control room functions for both organisations compared with current arrangements.

4. Progress with joint business case for increased collaboration between East Sussex and West Sussex Fire & Rescue Services (Exempt Categories 3 & 4)

4.1 The Fire Authority has considered a confidential report on progress towards developing options for closer working between the Fire and Rescue Services in West Sussex and East Sussex. The Fire Authority noted that positive progress is being made in terms of preparing the Business Case. A similar report is being considered by West Sussex County Council at its Cabinet meeting on Tuesday 22nd March.

4.2 Plans to examine options for closer working were announced in December 2010, in order to assess the overall benefits that could be achieved. Closer working would aim to streamline back office functions, improve operational resilience and also preserve frontline services to the public, in addition to a possible joint control room, bearing in mind the grant reductions both organisations will have to absorb over the next few years.

4.3 A number of options are being considered, including closer working as well as a possible merger to create a new Fire Authority covering West Sussex, East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove.

4.4 Meanwhile, work will continue to develop a full business case for consideration by both organisations in May/June this year, bearing in mind that not all of the required information was available currently, particularly with regard to the strategic financial issues and detailed financial savings expected to be generated. If a full merger is the favoured option, a twelve-week public consultation period would be required to take place before any final decisions can be taken. If collaboration is the preferred way forward, consultation will also focus more upon staff views.

Ted Kemble
Chairman

17 March 2011