

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 8 September 2011.

Present: Councillors Carden, Fawthrop, Freeman, Heaps, Howson, Kenward, Lambert, Livings (Chairman), MacCafferty, Pidgeon, Rufus, Stroud, Theobald, Thompson, Tidy, Waite and Wakefield.

1. Revenue Budget & Capital Programme Monitoring 2011/12

1.1 Members have considered the issues arising from the monitoring of the 2011/12 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme at 31 July 2011. The Revenue Budget Outturn for 2011/12 was predicted to underspend by £238,000, although Members noted that it was extremely early to accurately forecast outturn. Members also noted that the Capital Programme was currently subject to a mid-term review and that, since the Capital Programme and the resources to fund it had been agreed in February, an additional capital grant of £1.2m had been received from central government.

The Fire Authority has resolved:

- (i) To note the 2011/12 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme monitoring position as at 31 July 2011;
- (ii) To note variations to the Capital Programme (schemes accelerated from 2012/13 programme), namely:
 - a) Two pumping appliances (possibly with 1 in 7 foam units) - £480,000
 - b) Purchase of chassis for the combined aerial rescue pump (CARP) - £105,000
- (iii) To approve the new scheme variations to the Capital Programme, to be funded from existing resources, namely:
 - a) Purchase of aerial ladder platform (ALP) from leasing company - £81,000
 - b) Purchase of a second Breathing Apparatus Compressor for the Service Training Centre - £18,000
- (iv) the draft outturn position for the Capital Programme in 2010/11, including those schemes exceeding original budget provision by 10%

2. Crowborough Fire Station – Extension and Refurbishment

2.1 Members have considered a report about the requirements of the station accommodation and the condition survey for Crowborough Fire Station that had identified that the station was in need of more extensive refurbishment than could be provided by the capital provision in 2011/12 of £350,000. A more extensive and phased extension and refurbishment project would allow the remedial works to be completed whilst maintaining the operational viability from the site. It was proposed to start planning and procurement in the current financial year, and phased construction works in 2012/13, with a retention in the 2013/14 capital programme. The total costs of this project were estimated to be £950,000 as follows: 2011/12 - £50,000; 2012/13 - £885,000; 2013/14 - £15,000.

2.2 The Fire Authority has resolved to approve a variation to the five year capital programme to allow for the extension and refurbishment of Crowborough Fire Station to meet both accommodation and condition survey requirements, on the basis of the costs set out in the report.

3. Joint business case for increased collaboration and possible merger and formal consultation arrangements (exempt categories 3 and 4)

3.1 Members considered an oral report of the Chairman on the progress of discussions with West Sussex FRS regarding increased collaboration or a possible merger.

3.2 Members were informed of the weekly meetings taking place between officers of both FRSs, with discussions progressing well, although it was more difficult to obtain exact costings from West Sussex as these were tied in with the County Council's overall costs. The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive explained that there were still decisions to be made around the timing of council tax equalisation between the two FRSs and he also emphasised that, although a merger would create a sound Fire & Rescue Service from a professional perspective, it would not, in his view, be the right course of action if the financial and business case did not stack up, and it was ultimately, a decision to be made by elected members.

3.3 Various due diligence tests were being carried out, regarding the state of the fleet, assets, buildings, etc. in both Services. The two Services were working towards providing a solid Business Case for Members' consideration. The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive was due to meet Brighton & Hove Members at their Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting on 13 September and had also been attending public consultation meetings arranged by ORS, an independent body, as well as Focus Groups and staff meetings; he had not yet received a single indication of opposition to the proposal.

3.4 The Deputy Treasurer assured Members that both Treasurers would have to be satisfied with the financial aspects of the Business Case,

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including the impact on council taxpayers and the financial sustainability of any merged authority.

Councillor John Livings
Chairman

9 September 2011