

## 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 2 February 2012.

**Present:** Councillors Carden, Fawthrop, Healy, Heaps, Howson, Kenward, Livings (Chairman), MacCafferty, Ost, Pidgeon, Rufus, Scott, Sparks, Theobald, Thomas, Tidy, Waite and Wakefield.

### 1. Joint Business Case for Increased Collaboration and Possible Merger

1.1 The Fire Authority considered a joint officer report advising Members of the outcome of the latest advice from the DCLG on potential formula grant implications arising from a possible merger, and seeking a decision on the most appropriate way forward.

1.2 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive informed Members that a full business case had been prepared which indicated a positive outcome for merger. Unfortunately, the remaining financial issues could not be resolved which included the necessary outstanding information from the DCLG on Formula Grant exemplifications, thereby preventing a full and final evaluation of the strategic financial issues involved in a possible merger.

1.3 Members also noted that, whilst the uncertainty regarding the potential unravelling of any locally agreed split of current formula grant affected both organisations, the greatest financial risks of losing grant at a higher level than expected as an impact of creating a new Sussex CFA would fall upon West Sussex County Council.

1.4 The Deputy Treasurer said that, despite the level of liaison with the DCLG, it was still unclear as to how the Local Government Resource Review would work and how its outcomes would impact on both West Sussex County Council and East Sussex Fire Authority. Due to the level of uncertainty and failure to obtain formula grant figures, the Deputy Treasurer was unable to recommend full merger.

1.5 Members expressed their thanks for the hard work undertaken by all those involved in the process.

1.6 The Fire Authority agreed the following Notice of Motion that was moved by Councillor Sparks and seconded by Councillor Thomas:

“Following the outcome of the continuing discussions with West Sussex County Council, the work of the Joint Steering Group and discussions with DCLG, it has become apparent that, as a direct consequence of the Local Government Resource Review, West Sussex County Council has been unable to obtain sufficient clarity on its Fire grant element to enable the Business Case to be completed, despite the best efforts of all involved. On that basis, East Sussex Fire Authority is unable to take a decision to agree to a merged Fire Authority from 1st April 2013.”

1.7 The Fire Authority also :

- i) noted that the Joint Control Project is well underway, but appropriate future corporate governance arrangements will now need to be jointly agreed as the next priority issue in due course;
- ii) agreed that West Sussex County Council be advised of ESFA's decision on merger;
- iii) noted that relevant joint communications will be issued to keep all internal and external stakeholders informed at appropriate stages; and
- iv) asked the Joint Steering Group to continue to investigate ways of collaborative working with West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service that would be mutually beneficial provided any proposals do not incur excessive investment in ESFRS officers' time with any future joint work being commissioned to clear and unambiguous outcomes, appropriately and equitably resourced, and realistic timescales.

## **2. Joint Control Project – Progress Update**

2.1 The Fire Authority was advised on progress with the Joint Control project across East and West Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove. A successful bid had been made to DCLG for funds to assist in the creation of a new merged East and West Sussex Control Room, and funds totalling £3.6m had been allocated. The search was progressing to find a mutually suitable site along the A23 corridor and a 'go live' date of September 2013 had been agreed. Future increased operational resilience was expected and a team was now in place to oversee the process. Human Resources matters were currently being looked at, the structures of which would be brought back to a future meeting.

## **3. Fire Authority Service Planning Processes for 2012/13 and Beyond**

3.1 The Fire Authority considered relevant reports on the Service Planning Processes for 2012/13 and beyond, for approval for the purpose of setting the 2012/13 Council Tax precept and other relevant matters based upon information and related decisions made at the previous meeting in January 2012.

3.2 The Fire Authority noted that the final figures on council tax base and council tax collection fund deficit have enabled a Revenue Budget (including service investments and savings) to be set at £40.030m, for council tax band D increases to be kept to £81.86 if the latest council tax freeze grant was to be accepted.

3.3 The Deputy Treasurer felt 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 consistent with Fire Authority policy and were prudent and necessary. He reminded Members that the nature of its business the Fire Authority needed to recognise that risks, financial and otherwise, and their impact on the budget and reserves, may change during the year and would need to be continually reviewed and managed in line with the Authority's policy.

3.4 Members considered two main strategic resourcing options: a budget based on acceptance of the Council Tax Freeze Grant in 2012/13 and a consequent nil charge in precept, and a budget based on rejection of the grant and setting a precept of less than 4%.

3.5 Councillors MacCafferty, Rufus and Wakefield voted against accepting the Council Tax Freeze Grant.

3.6 The Fire Authority approved the necessary detailed budget and service planning decisions, including:

a) a budget requirement for the year 2012/13 of £40.030m; an increase of 2.1% on the 2011/12 base budget of £39.203m;

b) an amended Capital Programme payments for 2012/13 totalling £4.808m, with no additional revenue consequences;

c) in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992, and the acceptance of the latest Council Tax Freeze Grant in 2012/13, to approve a Council Tax requirement of £24.674m in 2012/13 which allows a nil change in precept of £81.86.

d) 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, in line with the regulations and to issue precepts accordingly.

#### **4. Member Allowances – Annual Review**

4.1 The Fire Authority has reviewed the Members' Allowance Scheme and has agreed a nil increase for 2012/13.

Councillor John Livings  
Chairman

7 February 2012