

## EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

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**Report of a meeting of the East Sussex Fire Authority held at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters at 10.30 hours on Thursday 13 December 2012.**

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

### **1. Review Of Service Provision Within The Hastings Borough**

1.1 Members of the Fire Authority considered a report that apprised them of the consultation responses to the proposal approved by the Fire Authority following the IRMP Review of service provision within the Hastings Borough and for the Fire Authority to determine the way forward.

1.2 Following a review of the Service provision within the Hastings Borough, the findings had been presented to the IRMP Forum, the Policy & Resources Panel and then the Fire Authority at its meeting in September. At this meeting, the Fire Authority had agreed to consult with local communities and stakeholders impacted by the following proposal to:

- Relocate the Wholetime appliance from The Ridge Community Fire Station to Bohemia Road Community Fire Station; and
- Maintain the Retained pumping appliance and Landrover at The Ridge on the Retained Duty System (RDS) with its existing establishment.

1.3 Members were advised that the 12 week period of consultation and engagement commenced with staff, representative bodies, communities, business organisations and local authorities in the Hastings Borough as well as adjacent areas affected by the proposal had ended on 7 December 2012.

1.4 The consultation and engagement process included the collection of opinions from staff, partners, stakeholders and the public using the following methods:

- Publication of the review and all supporting documents on the Service web site
- An online questionnaire
- A Service Brief entry inviting staff to view and consult on the review

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- Emails/letters to over 200 local councillors, businesses, stakeholders and community groups inviting them to view and consult on the review online\*
- A follow up e-mail/letter to stakeholders advising them of the stakeholder forum arrangements
- Presentations to all Hastings watches (plus Bexhill & Battle) conducted by the Community Risk Management Team
- Staff focus groups conducted by Opinion Research Services (ORS)
- A public focus group conducted by ORS
- A public forum conducted by ORS
- A stakeholder forum conducted by ORS
- A public meeting conducted by ESFRS
- Participation in public meetings held in Ore, Pett, Icklesham and Fairlight.

\*The following areas were included in the address list:

All Hastings wards - Ashdown, Baird, Braybrooke, Castle, Central St Leonards, Conquest, Gensing, Hollington, Maze Hill, Old Hastings, Ore, Silverhill, St Helens, Tressell, West St Leonards, Wishing Tree.

All Parish/District Councils in or adjacent to the station grounds – Fairlight, Pett, Guestling, Icklesham, Westfield, Brede, Sedlescombe, Crowhurst, Battle.

Also included were the East Sussex Federation of Small Businesses and Hastings & Area Chamber of Commerce.

- 1.5 Members were advised that the consultation had been managed by two different streams, those managed by Opinion Research Services (ORS) which included Public Focus Groups; Public Forum; Stakeholder Forum and local Staff Focus Groups and processes managed in-house which included staff meetings; online surveys, the public meeting and stakeholder emails/letters.
- 1.6 The in-house processes allowed anyone to attend and present their opinions whereas those carried out by ORS sought to get statistically representative, informed and independently verified outcomes.
- 1.7 Councillor Thomas, on behalf of the Conservative Group, wished to express his Group's thanks to the Officers who were involved in putting the report together. He felt the report, produced at the Fire Authority's request, was comprehensive and detailed and provided Members with helpful information.
- 1.8 Councillor Thomas also thanked the members of public, the firefighters and the trade unions who had taken the time to write to him and his

colleagues over this matter. He wished to pass on his assurance that they had read all of the letters and petitions.

- 1.9 He gave assurances that the Fire Authority took its responsibilities seriously and that he and his colleagues had not predetermined any decision as some reports had suggested. He noted that some facts had been presented incorrectly to the public and that those responsible had behaved in an irresponsible manner.
- 1.10 Councillor Thomas noted that although he had listened to the views expressed by local communities, local businesses and members of the public, challenging times were ahead and that difficult decisions would need to be made to balance the resources of the Service across the whole of East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove, and to the 800,000 people who live in the Service area.
- 1.11 Councillor Thomas noted the proposed Bexhill Link Road and the changes that would bring. He advised that the Conservatives' view was that there should be no changes until the construction was completed and further analysis could be undertaken on the impact upon operational services, if any, of the new road infrastructure.
- 1.12 Councillor Thomas put the following Motion to the Fire Authority, which was seconded by Councillor Fawthrop:
- “That this Authority continues to maintain a fire station at The Ridge and, in addition, continues to maintain a wholetime appliance at The Ridge and does not relocate an appliance to Bohemia Road and that the appliance at The Ridge is maintained on a 24/7 basis.
- The Fire Authority requests the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive to undertake community safety activities in the rural communities near to The Ridge to provide further reassurances to the public, that safety is our primary concern, and to report back to the Fire Authority.”
- 1.13 Councillor Sparks wished to thank the public, staff and stakeholders for their Invaluable contribution to the consultation process. He felt the report was sound and comprehensive and wanted to acknowledge the amount of time it would have taken to compile.
- 1.14 Councillor Sparks acknowledged that the proposals would have ensured that the Service would still have met its Service Standards and that, although the review was not financially driven, the Authority did have a responsibility to the County as a whole to manage its finances responsibly. Councillor Sparks wished to hear the Officers' view on the Motion before he voted on it.
- 1.15 Councillor Rufus acknowledged this was the first of many difficult decisions that lay ahead and through the consultation process, it was

clear that the public were becoming aware of the unpalatable nature of the decisions that had to be made.

- 1.16 Councillor Scott also acknowledged the financially challenging environment with the savage cuts to budgets. He felt it was right that the Fire Authority should review its business, however he would not support any cuts to frontline services. During the consultation, the questionnaires, letters, petitions, meetings, marches and social media had made it quite clear to the Authority that the proposal was not acceptable. He suggested that he had serious concerns over attendance times, particularly in the rural areas and referred to letters that he had received from residents, businesses and the local hospital.
- 1.17 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive reminded Members that operational Service Standards were set by the Fire Authority and East Sussex currently had one set of the best attendance times for Shire Counties in the Country. Members were also reminded that the IRMP process was to ensure that the Service provided the most appropriate cover and was not a financial saving exercise.
- 1.18 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive went on to add that, over the next 6 years, the Fire Authority would have to accept that there would be cuts to services including fewer firefighters, fewer appliances and fewer stations. He was disappointed by other local Authorities' responses to the consultation as they were only too aware of the current financial situation and whilst they have a variety of services to cut, East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service only has one as a single purpose fire and rescue service.
- 1.19 Councillors discussed the consultation processes and responses and unanimously agreed that:
- the Fire Authority continues to maintain a fire station at The Ridge and, in addition, continues to maintain a wholetime appliance at The Ridge and does not relocate an appliance to Bohemia Road. The appliance at The Ridge is maintained on a 24/7 basis; and
  - the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive be asked to undertake community safety activities in the rural communities near The Ridge, to provide further reassurances to the public that safety is our primary concern, and to report back to the Fire Authority.
2. **Sussex Control Centre – Agreement Between West Sussex County Council And East Sussex Fire Authority Pursuant To Section 16 Of The Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004**
- 2.1 The Fire Authority considered a report regarding an agreement pursuant to Section 16 of the Fire & Rescue Service Act 2004 between East Sussex Fire Authority and West Sussex County Council.

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- 2.2 At the Policy & Resources Panel held on 24 May 2012, it had been agreed that a Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004, Section 16 Agreement be developed in order to bring about the decision for East Sussex Fire Authority to discharge the call handling and mobilisation function on behalf of West Sussex County Council.
- 2.3 The main agreement was 31 pages with 31 clauses and had 7 schedules attached. The agreement would take effect from 1 May 2013 and continue for 7 years from the date that the Sussex Control Centre goes live. Both officers of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and West Sussex County Council had attended many meetings and many discussions to ensure, with the help of employment, property and contracts lawyers, that the interests of both parties were protected as far as were reasonably practicable.
- 2.4 **RESOLVED** – That the Fire Authority delegates resolution of the unresolved pensions' clauses to the Treasurer and Monitoring Officer and subject to West Sussex County Council affixing the seal, authorise the Monitoring Officer, after consultation with the Chairman, to affix the common seal.

Councillor John Livings  
Chairman

22 December 2012

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### **Report of a meeting of the East Sussex Fire Authority held at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters at 10.30 hours on Thursday 17 January 2013.**

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

#### **1. Fire Authority Service Planning Processes For 2013/14 And Beyond – Draft Revenue Budget 2013/14 And Capital Programme 2013/14 To 2017/18**

- 1.1 The Fire Authority considered a report that presented the draft 2013/14 Fire Authority Service Planning issues for their formal consideration. Members considered the draft detailed Service Planning document and noted that the approved Revenue Budget and Capital Programme would be incorporated into final versions of the 2013/14 Medium Term Plan and the 2013/14 Annual Plan, once the Fire Authority had approved them in February 2013, for subsequent publication. The Fire Authority noted the requirement to set its precept for 2013/14 at its meeting on 7 February 2013.
- 1.2 The Treasurer advised the Fire Authority on the key implications of all the issues set out in the report, including the need to await the remaining outstanding information before any final decisions could be taken on the precept at the February 2013 meeting – these included:
- i) the economic outlook and national funding changes;
  - ii) a summary of the agreed budget strategy and service priorities for the Fire Authority;
  - iii) the details of the draft committed Revenue Budget of £38.932m which is a net reduction £1.610m (-2.74%) on the 2012/13 base budget of £40.030m, a significant proportion of the net savings being achieved through the outcome of the Facing the Challenge proposals £1.325m;
  - iv) the implications of the Medium Term Plan which, based upon current presumptions, would result in net expenditure reductions of 1.44% to 2014/15, and subsequent increases of 0.38% to 2015/16, 1.79% to 2016/17 and 1.62% to 2017/18;

- v) the implications of the changes arising from the Local Government Finance Settlement consultation information which set out the implications for ESFRS in both 2013/14 and 2014/15 on the proposed figures for Revenue Support Grant, Business Rates Retention, Council Tax Freeze and Transitional Support Grant amounts with the resultant implications upon the council tax requirements for either Option A – accepting the CT Freeze Grant or Option B – rejecting it in favour of an increase up to the 2% threshold. Option A would result in a balanced budget and Option B would result in additional base budget flexibility of £0.183m in 2013/14 with the latter option helping to close the strategic resourcing gap in future years;
  - vi) a summary of the latest spending projections against DCLG grant for the Sussex Control Centre;
  - vii) a summary of the schemes included in the draft Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2017/18 ( base year 2012/13); outcomes of the 2013/14 fire capital grant distributions; overall costs over the period along with available capital resourcing and how such resourcing could be applied to meet the phasing of schemes in the Capital Programme;
  - viii) a summary of available reserves and balances and a new Reserves Policy for the Authority which sets out to explain the differences in the types of reserves held, the reasons for them and levels achieved, and proposes a minimum level of General Reserves set at 8% of Net Budget Requirement;
  - ix) a summary of the overall financial implications placed upon the Fire Authority if all of the detailed proposals set out are approved but dependent upon information still outstanding at this stage and whether or not the Fire Authority accept the Council Tax Freeze Grant (resourcing deficit of £2.017m by 2017/18) or reject it in favour of a council tax increase of up to 2% (resourcing deficit of £1.549m by 2017/18).
- 1.3 Finally, the Treasurer reminded Members of the information still outstanding; the fact that Government Grant figures may yet change after the consultation period ends; the current presumptions made on future council tax increases in the Medium Term projections; the range of risks the Fire Authority remains exposed to, especially as a result of the localisation of council tax support and business rates retention; and the need to set a Balanced Budget for 2013/14 as well as considering the medium term resourcing gap faced by the Fire Authority; and the uncertainty about funding after 2014/15 until the results of the next Comprehensive Spending review (CSR13) are known.
- 1.4 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive advised Members that council tax setting was a matter for them to decide upon at their meeting on 7 February 2013. He gave Members a summary of some of the other FRAs' likely council tax policy proposals they were progressing in the

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light of the recent advice given by Brandon Lewis, MP on the Government guidance for FRAs on council tax increases (up to 2% or £5 for lower quartile Fire & Rescue Authorities).

- 1.5 The Fire Authority noted that the current year's budget is expected to underspend. It was agreed that any final underspend at outturn should be returned to Balances to assist the Authority in managing the financial risks that it will face and the changes to the way it delivers its services that will be necessary in the medium term.
- 1.6 The Fire Authority noted that the draft estimates for 2013/14 included provision for pay awards, restricted to 1% in 2013/14 and 2% thereafter, and for an increase in other costs to take account of inflation to estimated 2013/14 outturn prices at 2.5%. The Fire Authority noted that the Government was considering ways by which FRAs could introduce other fees and charges subject to local consultation and this included being able to charge for false alarm calls from persistent offenders and proposals. CFOA were leading a detailed review of applying those charges on a national basis and details would be brought before the Fire Authority once the direction was known. The proposed increase in charges for special services was an average of 2.5%.
- 1.7 Councillor Tidy asked whether there was any scope to raise more revenue through fees and charges. The Treasurer explained about the legal constraints and that any short term measures would not produce any significant income. The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive added that the Service would have to set itself up as a trading company, should it wish to pursue this further, but it would have to be careful not to open itself to challenges from the private sector. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that ESFRS could not charge for services which it had a legal duty to provide, and could only cover its costs for other, discretionary services.
- 1.8 The Fire Authority noted the Government's new Business Rates Retention scheme, and the discussions taking place with the district and borough councils in East Sussex about the viability of pooling business rates, which could offer the opportunity to increase funding allocations. Members also noted the Government's introduction of the localisation of Council Tax support which could impact on Council Tax collection rates, increasing the risk of a deficit in future years.
- 1.9 The Treasurer advised that the latest budget modelling had been done based on two scenarios: the acceptance of the latest offer by the Government of a one year Council tax freeze grant for 2013/14, based on current information available and best estimates; or rejecting the Council Tax Freeze Grant in 2013/14 and increasing Council Tax by up to 2%.
- 1.10 Councillor Sparks understood that deficit reduction policies would need to be in place until as late as 2022, rather than the suggested 2018, and



also noted the risks associated with inflation rising to 4%, rather than the 2.5% originally planned for. He also drew Members' attention to the results of the recent public consultation exercise which indicated that 92% of residents thought that the Service should reject the Government's freeze grant and increase Council Tax by 2%, to help fund fire and rescue services in future years.

- 1.11 Councillor Thomas thanked the Treasurer for a very helpful summary of the situation and Councillor Scott suggested that Members and officers needed to 'think outside the box', and look again at a possible merger with West Sussex, Surrey or Kent; and more partnership and collaborative working.
- 1.12 Councillor Rufus was pleased that Members were now focussing on the longer term, and also looking at balances and reserves, and suggested that Members should not be thinking about forthcoming elections when deciding on the council tax at the February meeting.
- 1.13 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive reminded Members of the partnership work currently being undertaken and stated that, although ESFRS may wish to merge with another Fire & Rescue Service, there did not, currently, seem to be a neighbouring Service wishing to explore a merger. Should a potential partner be identified, there would still be a run-in time of at least two years, making it even more essential to identify and deliver medium and long-term savings, rather than speculate on assumptions of other models arising in the medium term.
- 1.14 Councillor Scott suggested setting up staff commissioning groups, not just representative bodies, to discuss their ideas for making savings and the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive confirmed that these were already in place, with over 100 members of staff already having been consulted. Councillor Carden was concerned that the new Brighton & Hove City Plan, which included plans for a further 12,000 houses, should be taken into account.
- 1.15 Members resolved that:
  - a) the projected expenditure for 2012/13 (Section 2.1) be noted;
  - b) the continued Revenue Budget consultations taking place (Section 2.2.3) be noted;
  - c) the committed budget for 2013/14 of **£38.932m** including provision for pay awards of 1% in 2013/14, price increases of typically 2.5% and net inescapable commitments (Sections 4.2.5, 4.2.7 and 4.2.8) be approved;
  - d) the fees and charges as set out in section 4.2.6 and in Appendix B be approved;

- e) the absence of Service Investment proposals in the 2013/14 Revenue Budget and reasons for their absence as highlighted in Section 4.2.10 be noted;
- f) the amended Capital Programme for 2012/13 totalling **£4.050m** and the Capital Programme for 2013/14 totalling **£4.150m**, as set out in Section 5 be approved, and it be noted that there are no related revenue consequences;
- g) the Reserves and Balances Policy set out in Appendix F and the proposed level of reserves summarised in Table 15 be approved;
- h) determining whether or not to accept the Council Tax Freeze Grant be deferred until the February 2013 precept setting meeting as detailed budget and resourcing information still needs to be confirmed (covered in Section 7 and Tables 16 and 17);
- i) the format of the Fire Authority's council tax information will be finalised after the decisions made at the Fire Authority meeting on 7 February 2013 be noted; and
- j) the detailed recommendations for setting the precept will be included in the final Revenue Budget report to be presented to the Fire Authority at its 7 February 2013 meeting, using the Local Government Finance Settlement and final tax base figures yet to be published be noted.

## **2. Fire Safety Education Programme In Primary Schools 2011/12 Performance Survey**

- 2.1 The Fire Authority considered a report that informed them of the Service's performance on the Fire Safety Education in primary schools from the results of the ORS survey.
- 2.2 This was the third complete academic year that the Education Team had delivered its revised Primary School programme, targeted at Year 2 and Year 5 pupils, with further increased interactive teaching, an emphasis on learning outcomes, and collaborative work with the Sussex Police Education Team which was helping to deliver road safety education. A total of 128 completed questionnaires had been returned to ORS and Members noted the extremely positive overall results of the survey, with all respondents stating they were satisfied with the visit, and 86% saying they were 'very satisfied'. All respondents felt that the information was communicated well to the year groups involved in the visit.
- 2.3 Members noted the areas for the Team to develop and improve, including continuing to ensure that every session is as interactive and engaging as possible and can be adapted to the needs of the pupils in the class at the point of delivery and be fully inclusive; and developing and promoting more activities for follow-on work that teachers can

deliver, hence reinforcing the Service's safety messages beyond the time in the classroom and enabling pupils to 'remember what they have been taught'. The work of the Team would be reviewed during 2013/14 as part of the IRMP review of prevention and protection services.

- 2.4 Councillor Ost had attended a session for Key Stage 1 pupils at the primary school where he is Chair of Governors and was very impressed with the Team's work. Councillor Heaps had attended a Safe Drive Stay Alive session which was incredibly well presented and she stressed how important it was to find funding to be able to continue to deliver a wide range of community safety initiatives.
- 2.5 Councillor Scott proposed that the Service discuss potential government grants with Hastings Borough Council who had bid for, which he thought would be appropriate for funding similar areas of work. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that he would be meeting with HBC officers during the next week, and would discuss it with them then.
- 2.6 Members noted the Service's performance and plans for further improvement, as set out in the report.

Councillor John Livings  
Chairman

18 January 2013