

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 Friday 14 February 2014.

Present: Councillors Barnes, Butler, Carden, Earl, Galley, Hawtree, Howson (Chairman), Lambert, Peltzer Dunn, Powell, Pragnell, Rufus (Vice-Chair), Scott, Sheppard, Taylor, Theobald and Wincott.

1. Fire Authority Service Planning Processes For 2014/15 And Beyond

1.1 The Fire Authority has agreed its Annual Plan for 2014/15. This takes account of the outcomes of the 2014/15 service planning preparations, current community risk management review activities, the latest Revenue Budget and Capital Programme and the outcomes of the corporate performance results in 2013/14.

1.2 The Fire Authority has also considered its final draft 2014/15 Revenue Budget and Interim Capital Programme. The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) had been updated in July 2013 when it was identified that £7.1m savings had to be found over the next 5 years as a result of the reductions in Government grant that had been announced and that Fire Authorities had been advised to plan for. The revenue budget was drawn up on the basis of savings that had to be made to deliver a sustainable budget going forwards. Whilst good progress had been made in identifying savings, a funding gap of £2.6m still had to be identified based on current assumptions.

1.3 The MTFP 2014/15 – 2018/19 predictions had been based on a 1.94% Council Tax rise going forward each year, but even this would still leave £2.3m - £2.6m of savings to be found. If the Government's freeze grant were to be accepted and if the freeze grant was built into the base budget, the savings required could be in excess of £3m. If the freeze grant was not built into the base budget, then the saving required could be greater.

1.4 Members have considered calculations for two options. Option A was to accept the Council Tax Freeze grant in 2014/15 which would involve setting a net budget requirement of £38.602m, a Council Tax requirement of £21.881m and freezing Band D Council Tax at £81.86 i.e. 0% increase on 2013/14. Option B was to increase Council Tax by 1.94% which would involve setting a net budget requirement of up to £38.775m, a Council Tax Requirement of £22.306m and increasing Band D Council Tax to £83.45.

1.5 The Fire Authority agreed an increase in Council Tax precept of 1.94%.

2. Integrated Risk Management (Irm) Review Of Prevention, Protection And Response

2.1 The Fire Authority has considered a draft consultation document on the outcomes of the IRMP Review of Prevention, Protection and Response. This formed part of the Phase 2 and 3 proposals necessary to meet the funding gap and consequential savings target of £7.1m, as identified within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the period 2014/15 – 2018/19. Members were mindful of the need to deliver savings of approximately £7.1m, or 18.2% of the current revenue budget, over the next five years (in addition to £1.3m of savings already agreed for 2014/15).

2.2 Over the last decade, the Fire & Rescue Service nationally and locally had seen a significant reduction in the number of incidents that it had been required to attend, and it was now opportune to change the way in which operational services were delivered, whilst seeking to maintain performance standards and continuing to invest in firefighter safety.

2.3 All of the phases presented proposals which would lead to a reduction in posts across the Authority, with fewer staff working on fire stations and in prevention and protection and support services. Current estimates were that the necessary reduction in staff to meet the savings required would be between 50-80 posts. The Authority would continue to seek to minimise the risk of compulsory redundancies through natural turnover, holding vacancies, and its redeployment policy.

2.4 The Fire Authority has agreed to the commencement of formal consultation on the proposals contained in Phase 2 and Phase 3, for 10 weeks starting on 17 February 2014. The Fire Authority will consider a report on the consultation outcomes at its meeting on 5 June 2014.

Note: The consultation period is running until Monday 28 April 2014 and the documentation is available on the ESFRS website at:

<http://www.esfrs.org/publicconsultation/>

COUNCILLOR PHILIP HOWSON
Chairman of East Sussex Fire Authority

18 February 2014