

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 11 September 2014.

Present: Councillors Barnes, Buchanan, Butler, Carden, Deane, Earl, Galley, Hawtree, Howson, Lambert, Peltzer Dunn, Powell, Scott, Sheppard, Taylor, Theobald and Whetstone.

1. 2015/16 STRATEGIC SERVICE PLANNING AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

1.1 The Fire Authority considered a report that set out the medium term service planning strategy and medium term financial plan for 2015/16-2019/20.

1.2 The Treasurer informed Members that the difference in income between accepting a 1% Freeze Grant and raising Council Tax by 1.94% in 2015/16 was £181,000. The MTFP showed this gap widening in future years, to £303,000 by 2019/20, as the Freeze Grant was rolled into Revenue Support Grant, which was assumed to be subject to further annual reductions.

1.3 Members were advised that the proposal to draw down £200,000 to fund the Service Transformation Team would enable difficult decisions to be implemented and worked through in a safe and effective way, including the investigation of the proposals in Phase 3 of the IRMP.

1.4 The CFO&CE reminded Members that, even with a council tax increase of 1.94% each year over the 5-year MTFP, further savings of £1.7m would still be needed. The MTFP also indicated that the Authority would be operating a surplus over at least the next two years, and this could be used to help manage the transformation process and off-set any short term pressures.

1.5 Members resolved that:

1.5.1 the updated medium term financial plan for 2015/16 – 2019/20 and its underlying assumptions be approved (12 votes for, 5 against, 1 abstention);

1.5.2 the continuing work under the Changing the Service Shaping our Future programme to identify savings options to meet required savings targets set out in the report be noted; and

1.5.3 the drawdown of up to £200,000 from the Improvement and Efficiency Reserve to fund the Service Transformation Team be approved (11 votes for, 3 against, 4 abstentions).

2. 2014/15 REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING

2.1 The Fire Authority considered a report on issues arising from the monitoring of the 2014/15 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme as at 31 July 2014.

2.2 Members suggested looking further into charging for some services, e.g. attendance at false alarms, and providing advice to developers on how to equip buildings. Some

Members also felt that mergers alone would not be enough to provide the savings required, and that Regional FRSs would be the way forward – he acknowledged that this would have to be driven by government. They also asked about sharing services with Police and ambulance, as in France and the CFO&CE suggested this be a future topic for a Members' Seminar.

2.3 Members approved a variation to the Capital Programme by £1,855,000 for the Day Crewed Plus savings proposal; and noted the following:

2.3.1 the projected 2014/15 Revenue Budget outturn;

2.3.2 the current and planned use of Reserves;

2.3.3 the monitoring of savings taken in 2014/15; and

2.3.4 the projected Capital Programme outturn.

3. 2013/14 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE OUTCOME REPORT

3.1 The Fire Authority considered a report that presented the 2013/14 Performance Outcome results.

3.2 Members questioned why Lewes Borough seemed to be performing so badly regarding reductions in primary fires, accidental dwelling fires and deliberate primary fires, and were informed that the performance appeared to be 'bad' due to the small number base in Lewes. Officers would include actual figures, or figures per 1,000 head of population, in future reports which would reflect trends more transparently.

3.3 ACO Rolph confirmed sickness figures for the current year were improving and that the sickness target for this year was 6.5 days, which the Service looked set to achieve. Currently, figures for Quarter 1 of 2014/15 were showing a 24% reduction in absence. This was due in part to the introduction of a new HR database and Crewing database and the introduction of the Bradford factor scoring index.

3.4 ACFO Ferrand explained that, while figures for injuries were high enough to alert officers, the year-on-year trend analysis had not identified any discernable patterns of cause; the Scrutiny & Audit Panel would consider this in due course.

3.5 Members noted the 2013/14 performance results.

The Chairman left the meeting at this point (12.40 hours), due to a worsening chest condition, and the Vice-Chair, Councillor Lambert, took the Chair

4. BUSINESS RATE POOLING

4.1 The Fire Authority considered a report that sought their approval to enter into a Business Rates Pool, following which an application would be submitted on behalf of the East Sussex County, Borough, and District Councils and the East Sussex Fire Authority in October 2014, subject to it being financially advantageous to do so after a further financial review in September 2014.

4.2 The Treasurer explained that, once the Pool had been approved, there was an opportunity for any Authority to withdraw from it for a short period, once the Local Government Finance Settlement was announced in December, but this would mean that the whole Pool could not proceed. The current composition of the Pool was believed to be manageable and would be administered by Wealden Borough Council.

4.3 Members agreed the following:

4.3.1 Wealden District Council be nominated as the lead authority

4.3.2 in principle, no authority will receive a lower level of funding than they would have received without the pool;

4.3.3 resources gained on the basis of the levy amount that was saved by individual authorities be split as follows: 40% to ESCC, 10% to the Fire Authority and the remaining 50% split amongst the District/Borough Councils;

4.3.4 the finalisation of the submission, agreement of the Memorandum of Understanding, and the final decision on whether to partake in the pool, along with the annual review, is delegated to respective Chief Finance Officers for the reasons outlined in the report; and

4.3.5 Chief Finance Officers review membership of the Pool on an annual basis. Should an authority decide to withdraw membership, notification of their intent to do so to be given to the remaining authorities at the earliest opportunity.

5. FACING THE FUTURE: FINDINGS FROM THE REVIEW OF EFFICIENCIES AND OPERATIONS IN FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND

5.1 The Fire Authority considered a report that advised them of the written Ministerial statement on Sir Ken Knight's review of efficiencies and operations in Fire and Rescue Authorities in England, and noted the following:

5.1.1 the publication and key review findings, the implications of which will be considered in detail as part of the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan;

5.1.2 the commencement of an independent review of the conditions of service for operational staff in the fire and rescue service; and

5.1.3 details of areas of collaboration/shared services currently being reviewed by officers.

6. NEWHAVEN COMMUNITY FIRE STATION

6.1 The Fire Authority considered a report that advised them of progress towards the construction of the new community fire station.

6.2 ACFO Ferrand confirmed that a report would be brought to the Policy & Resources Panel in November setting out detail for the value of the Fort Road site which is being disposed of.

6.3 Members noted the progress as set out in the report.

7. SUSSEX CONTROL CENTRE

7.1 The Fire Authority considered a report that updated them on the progress and financial position of the Sussex Control Centre Project.

7.2 ACO Rolph informed Members that the only new item to report was the actuarial review of the net strain on the pension fund. She also confirmed that all work-streams for the SCC project were complete apart from the introduction of the new mobilising system and the buddying arrangements with Cambridgeshire FRS.

7.3 Members noted the latest position in relation to progress and the financial position.

8. PRINCIPAL OFFICERS' PAY – NJC SETTLEMENT

8.1 The Fire Authority considered a report of the outcome of the negotiations between the National Employers and the Association of Principal Fire Officers regarding the annual NJC pay award for 2014, which has been agreed by the National Employers, to be awarded to Brigade Managers.

8.2 Members were reminded that the pay award had been agreed nationally and was for noting – the Principal Officers had already received the pay award. The Head of Finance & Procurement confirmed that firefighters had received a 1% pay rise from 1 July 2014 – provision had been made in the budget for the pay awards.

8.3 Members noted that the pay award for 2014, as determined by the NJC Scheme of Conditions of Service for Brigade Managers will be implemented.

COUNCILLOR PHILIP HOWSON
Chairman of East Sussex Fire Authority

9 October 2014