

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 December 2014.

Present: Councillors Barnes, Buchanan, Deane, Earl, Galley, Howson (Chairman), Lambert, Peltzer Dunn, Powell, Pragnell, Scott, Sheppard, Taylor, Theobald and Wincott.

1. NEWHAVEN FIRE

1.1 Members noted an oral report from the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive (CFO&CE) who gave details about the recent fire at Newhaven. The incident had lasted for 7 days, had been fought 24/7, involved other agencies, and included support from the high volume pump from Surrey FRS. Valuable support had been given by the British Red Cross for which the Fire Authority recorded its gratitude.

1.2 The CFO&CE anticipated that the cost of attending the incident would impact on the budget for Retained Duty firefighters. Some equipment had been damaged at the incident. The FRS was unable to recover costs as attendance had been a statutory duty, not a special service (which could be charged). Councillor Buchanan suggested that in view of the continued reduction in government grant funding, the Government should be lobbied to allow FRSs to recover costs from insurers.

1.3 The CFO&CE assured Members that whilst crews and equipment had been committed to the incident at Newhaven, ESFRS would still have been able to provide responses to other incidents, and that mutual aid assistance from other FRSs would have been available to call upon.

2. THE AUTUMN STATEMENT

2.1 The Fire Authority considered an overview of the Chancellor's autumn statement issued on 3rd December. No new announcements on council tax had been made. The local government finance settlement was expected on 17 December 2014, when the referendum threshold was expected to be announced.

2.2 The government would continue to reform and take tough decisions on public sector pay while it continued to reduce the current budget deficit until 2017-18; it would be assessing the result of public sector pay bill control pilots in the next Spending Review. It would take further action to ensure the full costs of providing pensions for public service workers are met by employers. The autumn statement did not include an announcement about the employer's contribution rate for the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015.

2.3 The CFO&CE informed Members that the DCLG's budget had not been ring-fenced and, therefore, fire and rescue services would almost certainly have to contribute to the savings total with further reductions in grant, and a greater level of

savings required. The Fire Authority's current Medium Term Finance Plan assumed that Council Tax will be increased by 1.94% each year over the next five years.

2.4 The Fire Authority had recently submitted bids for capital funding to DCLG (to fund a joint facility at Newhaven fire station, works at Roedean and The Ridge Fire Stations to introduce Day Crewed Plus). None of these bids had been successful. The successful bids had included not only shared buildings/facilities, but also joint teams of staff delivering public services.

2.5 The Policy & Resources Panel (13 November 2014) had agreed to proceed with the development of a business case to relocate ESFRS headquarters to the Sussex Police HQ site in Lewes and the development of a disposal strategy for the current ESFRS HQ site. Sussex Police supported working together, and the integration of some services would achieve revenue savings. A full business case was being prepared.

2.6 Members noted the oral report.

3 THE FIRE AUTHORITY'S CONSTITUTION

3.1 The current Members' Handbook brought together the Authority's constitutional documents including, amongst other things, standing orders, contract standing orders, financial regulations, the Members Code of Conduct and the Scheme of Delegations. It was proposed that the Members' Handbook be rebranded to 'The Constitution'. This would include constitutional documents, information and guidance for Members.

3.2 The Scrutiny & Audit Panel had considered the latest CIPFA guidance on the function and operation of audit committees and had recommended approval of revised terms of reference for the Scrutiny & Audit Panel. The Scheme of Delegated Functions had been streamlined and was presented for consideration and approval.

3.3 The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 required the Authority to establish a local Pension Board in relation to the Firefighters Pension Scheme, and further changes to the Constitution would be required to establish this by 1 April 2015.

3.4 Members discussed the substitution arrangements for those occasions when Members could not attend Fire Authority meetings. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised Members that the Fire Authority could not dispense with the substitution arrangement, as the Combination Order that established the Fire Authority provided for Members to be appointed from each constituent authority and this was on a political balance basis. The constituent authorities were not obliged to appoint a substitute but there may be occasions when Group Leaders wished this arrangement to apply. Where Members could not attend a Panel meeting that they had been appointed to, a substitute could be appointed by the relevant Group Leader from amongst the members of their Group serving on the Fire Authority.

3.5 Members considered that a quorum of 2 for Panel meetings was insufficient. It was agreed that the quorum for Panels be increased to three voting members to be introduced with immediate effect. The report proposed that the political balance requirements should be disappplied to the Principal Officer Appointments Panel so allowing each political group to be represented on the Panel, including the Chairman of the Fire Authority. Members agreed this approach.

3.6 Members agreed the following:

3.6.1 approval of the revised terms of reference for the Scrutiny & Audit Panel;

3.6.2 the quorum for Panels to be amended to 3 voting members with immediate effect;

3.6.3 the Constitution be approved to be brought into effect from the next annual meeting of the Authority, including:

a) the authority to decide sick pay appeals being removed from the Urgency Panel and included in the Human Resources Panel terms of reference;

b) the political balance requirements (sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government Act 1989) shall not apply to the Principal Officer Appointment Panel or the Standards Hearing Panel;

3.6.4 the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make any minor consequential amendments as necessary; and

3.6.5 that the next officer led review will be carried out in early 2016

COUNCILLOR PHILIP HOWSON
CHAIRMAN OF EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

12 December 2014