

## 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 Tuesday 14 February 2017.**

Present: Councillors Barnes, Buchanan, Butler, Deane, Earl, Galley, Howson (Chairman), Lambert (Vice-Chair), O'Quinn, Peltzer Dunn, Penn, Pragnell, Sheppard, Taylor and Theobald.

#### **1. URGENT ITEMS AND CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

##### **1.1 Councillor John Barnes MBE**

The Chairman congratulated Councillor Barnes on receiving an MBE from Her Majesty the Queen in her New Year's Honours in recognition of his voluntary services to the community of Etchingham.

##### **1.2 Sue Klein**

The Chairman informed Members that this would be Sue's last meeting of the Fire Authority. After more than 40 years of public service, and nearly 14 years looking after the Fire Authority, she had decided not to go to Lewes but to take early retirement. The Chairman presented Sue with gifts from the Members and the CFO presented her with a Certificate of Service.

##### **1.3 CFO Gary Walsh**

This was Gary's last meeting as Chief Fire Officer and a presentation was made to him by the Chairman on behalf of Members. Group Leaders and Members were sorry to see Gary leave and spoke of his strong sense of public service and strong moral compass. Members thanked Gary for his commitment to the Fire Authority and his support and understanding and wished him a long and happy retirement.

##### **1.4 Sussex Control Centre**

ACFO Andrews updated Members on the Factory Acceptance Tests which had taken place during the previous week. Four low level issues had been identified, but there were no concerns and progress could now be made to Systems Acceptance Testing, scheduled from 3 to 14 April; Bluelightworks were still evaluating governance and progress and it was anticipated that the go-live date of 21 June 2017 would be met.

##### **1.5 HQ Relocation**

The Treasurer updated Members on the relocation of Service HQ to Lewes. This had now been put back by two weeks, to 3 April 2017, to provide additional time to manage network connectivity at the new HQ site, ensure that staff were in receipt of excess mileage payments before having to incur additional travel costs and to ensure the safety and security of the removals process.

The Clerk confirmed that rooms had been booked at County Hall for Panel meetings in April, and at Hove Town Hall for the Annual Fire Authority meeting in June.

**2. FIRE AUTHORITY SERVICE PLANNING PROCESSES FOR 2017/18 AND BEYOND, REVENUE BUDGET 2017/18 AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2017/18 TO 2021/22**

- 2.1 Members considered report that sought their approval of the Fire Authority's Revenue Budget 2017/18, Capital Strategy 2017/18 to 2021/22 and Medium Term Finance Plan for 2017/18 to 2021/22.
- 2.2 The Authority's draft budget proposals for 2017/18 had been considered by the Policy & Resources Panel on 19 January 2017. Since that meeting the report had been updated to reflect final council tax and business rates information, collection fund positions and the dissolving of the business rate pool. The Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) would not be finalised until the Local Government Finance Report (England) 2017/18 had been approved by Parliament and this was expected on 22 February.
- 2.3 Members noted that the Authority had continued to make good progress in delivering agreed savings proposals over the last 12 months. The latest version of the MTFP showed that the Authority had already identified £1.350m of savings in 2017/18 and a total of £1.937m savings in total over the life of the MTFP. Officers would continue to explore the potential for further savings as part of the integrated business planning and budget setting process and through collaboration with partners.
- 2.4 The budget had been developed to facilitate the delivery of the Authority's purpose and commitments and the priorities set out in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2017-20, which was consulted upon during 2016. As the IRMP priorities were further developed the financial implications would be built into future budget plans.
- 2.5 The report outlined proposals for setting a balanced revenue budget for 2017/18, including commitments and growth bids, which would be subject to the Authority agreeing a 1.94% increase in its council tax in line with its existing budget strategy. The MTFP set out how the Authority planned to achieve a balanced budget over the medium term.
- 2.6 The Capital Strategy reflected the Authority's identified capital investment requirements for the next five years which could be financed from existing resources without the need to incur additional borrowing. This included new schemes for the refurbishment of Preston Circus and building of a new workshop facility with emergency services partners. A further review of both the Capital Strategy and arrangements for the future funding of its delivery would be undertaken during 2017/18 to reflect the investment proposals in the revised IMD and Estates Strategies.

- 2.7 The Treasurer informed Members that the Authority had acted prudently in establishing reserves and balances to meet its assessed risks and to provide one off funding for specific priorities. This continued to provide the funding necessary to support the Authority's transformation programme and meet its capital investment priorities over the next five years.
- 2.8 Following a question from Councillor Galley, the Treasurer clarified the relationship between the Capital Program Reserve and Capital Receipts Reserve. He also confirmed that the Capital Receipts Reserve included the original estimated value of the HQ building, and not the final selling price, as the sale had not yet been concluded.
- 2.9 Councillor Theobald was pleased to note the plans to redevelop Preston Circus and continue to operate it as a fire station. She asked about the new Service pressures which included the FBU representative being a budgeted post and the CFO explained that this was currently needed on a full time basis, but could revert to a part time secondment when the staff consultation requirements had eased off.
- 2.10 Councillor Theobald also queried the requirement for a temporary Estates Project Support Officer and Senior Estates Surveyor and the Treasurer explained that the first post was needed for three months to support the development of the Travel Plan (for the HQ move to Lewes) and the second post was needed for 2017/18 due to the increasing number of capital projects currently being progressed and to allow capacity to develop a new Estates Strategy.
- 2.11 Councillor Barnes supported the recommendations and agreed with the need for a cautious approach. He was comfortable with the reserves policy and agreed with Councillor Theobald that the redevelopment of Preston Circus was to be welcomed. He also welcomed the estates review scheduled for the summer, with the increasing number of housing projects, particularly in the Wealden area.
- 2.12 Members resolved that:
- i) an increase in council tax of 1.94% be approved and, as a result:
    - (i) the budget proposals set out in the report and the net budget requirement of £37.403m for 2017/18 be approved;
    - (ii) the council tax requirement of £25.036m be approved; and
    - (iii) the council tax and precepts as set out in Appendix F to the report (and set out in the attached Appendix A), be approved.
  - ii) the capital programme for the next five years and the capital budget of £4.677m for 2017/18 and the plans to use capital grant, capital receipts and revenue contributions to finance capital expenditure be approved;
  - iii) the maintenance of the General Reserve at a minimum of 8% of the net revenue budget over the medium term be approved;

- iv) the fees and charges set out in the report be approved; and
- v) the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Treasurer, be authorised to make any adjustments to the presentation of the budget to reflect the final Local Government Finance Settlement.

### **3. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR 2017/18**

- 3.1 Members considered a report that contained recommendations about the borrowing limits, the prudential indicators and limits, the investment strategy and policy as required by Section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003 and the Prudential Code for Capital Finance 2004.
- 3.2 Councillor Galley asked the Treasurer to clarify the difference between the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) and the Capital Asset Strategy (CAS). The Treasurer explained that the CFR set out the underlying need to borrow, whereas the CAS set out the planned financing of the capital programme from all sources. The Treasurer confirmed that there were no plans to finance any projects through borrowing over the lifetime of the CAS.
- 3.3 Councillor Barnes considered that the Authority had been very conservative in its treasury management, with very low income from reserves. He suggested that improved revenue could be obtained from better use of the estate, such as Preston Circus, and partnership working, and that the Authority should not be afraid of borrowing if increased revenue could be obtained.
- 3.4 Members resolved that:
  - i) the Treasury Management Strategy and Policy Statement for 2017/18 be approved (and adopted for the remainder of 2016/17);
  - ii) for 2017/18, the Authorised Limit for borrowing shall be £13.83m;
  - iii) the prudential indicators be adopted as set out in the attached Appendix 2 of the report; and
  - iv) the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement for 2017/18 be approved as set out in Appendix 3 of the report.

### **4. APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS**

- 4.1 Members received a report that set out the Scrutiny & Audit Panel's preferred option for the appointment of external auditors from 1 April 2018, and accepted the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) invitation to opt-in to the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors from 1 April 2018.

### **5. PAY POLICY STATEMENT FOR 2017/18**

- 5.1 Members considered a report that sought their approval of the Fire Authority's Pay Policy Statement for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018 and approved the Statement.

**6. HEALTH, SAFETY & WELL-BEING STRATEGY 2017-2020**

- 6.1 Members considered a report that sought their approval of the revised Health, Safety & Well-being Strategy for the period 2017-2020 and approved the Strategy for adoption.

The meeting concluded at 12:20 hours.

**COUNCILLOR PHILIP HOWSON  
CHAIRMAN OF EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY**

27 February 2017

**EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY: PRECEPT FOR 2017/18**  
**REF: S43 LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1992**

|   |                        |                           |
|---|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>NET BUDGET REQUIREMENT</b>                             | <b>£</b>               | <b>£</b>                  |
|   |                        | <b>37,403,000.00</b>      |
| Forecast Business Rates retained                          | 2,392,000.00           |                           |
| Top Up grant  | 4,821,000.00           |                           |
| Total Base Line funding                                   | 7,213,000.00           |                           |
| Add Revenue Support Grant                                 | 4,524,000.00           |                           |
| Total Grant funding (excluding transitional/freeze grant) | 11,737,000.00          |                           |
| Transition Grant  | 122,000.00             |                           |
| Section 31 Grant Business Rates adjustment                | 258,000.00             |                           |
| Previous Year's Surpluses/(Deficits)                      | 250,000.00             |                           |
| <b>Total Council Tax required</b>                         |                        | <b>25,036,000.00</b>      |
| <b>Tax base</b>   | <b>283,210.67</b>      |                           |
| <b>Basic Council Tax (Band D equivalent)</b>              |                        | <b>88.40</b>              |
| <b>Basic Council Tax from above calculation</b>           |                        | <b><u>Council Tax</u></b> |
| <b>Band A</b>   | <b>6/9</b>             | <b>58.93</b>              |
| <b>Band B</b>   | <b>7/9</b>             | <b>68.76</b>              |
| <b>Band C</b>   | <b>8/9</b>             | <b>78.58</b>              |
| <b>Band D</b>   | <b>9/9</b>             | <b>88.40</b>              |
| <b>Band E</b>   | <b>11/9</b>            | <b>108.04</b>             |
| <b>Band F</b>   | <b>13/9</b>            | <b>127.69</b>             |
| <b>Band G</b>   | <b>15/9</b>            | <b>147.33</b>             |
| <b>Band H</b>   | <b>18/9</b>            | <b>176.80</b>             |
|   | <b><u>Tax Base</u></b> | <b><u>Precept</u></b>     |
| <b>Brighton and Hove</b>                                  | <b>87,388.80</b>       | <b>7,725,170</b>          |
| <b>Eastbourne</b>   | <b>33,923.70</b>       | <b>2,998,855</b>          |
| <b>Hastings</b>   | <b>25,095.00</b>       | <b>2,218,398</b>          |
| <b>Lewes</b>  | <b>36,345.60</b>       | <b>3,212,951</b>          |
| <b>Rother</b>   | <b>37,260.97</b>       | <b>3,293,870</b>          |
| <b>Wealden</b>  | <b>63,196.60</b>       | <b>5,586,579</b>          |
|   | <b>283,210.67</b>      | <b>25,035,823</b>         |